'Transactional Sexting' and the 'Sponsor' Factor among Middle Level College Students in Nairobi, Kenya

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'Transactional Sexting' and the 'Sponsor' Factor among Middle Level College Students in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract
Sexting, which involves use of smartphones to create and share sexually explicit and implicit content, is on the rise among the youth in Kenya. Though there is limited scientific evidence, it is believed that sexting takes place in transactional sex. Therefore, this study explored the experiences and perspectives of college students on how sexting messages are exchanged in transactional sexual relationships. The study adopted qualitative research approach and multiple case study method. Convenience sampling strategy was used to select five colleges, from which a sample of 65 students, aged 18-25 years, was drawn through purposive and snowball techniques. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to generate the data. The interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The findings of the study suggest that sexting that involves the sender creating and sharing sexually explicit/implicit text messages and photographs in 'sponsor' and cougar relationships is perceived to be common and practiced by some students. The word 'transactional sexting' was coined to denote this phenomenon. This article concludes that the merge of transactional sex and sexting is complex and multifaceted. Both transactional sex and sexting are associated with grave consequences and reflect existing power structures, and changing technological and social values. Therefore, the study recommends the development of intervention programmes that address the negative consequences, existing patriarchal power structures and promote positive social behaviour change.

Key Words: Sexting, Transactional Sexual Relationships, College Students, Gender And Power Dynamics, Modernity And Consumerism

Introduction

Sexting is a portmanteau of the words 'sex' and 'texting'. In this paper, sexting is operationalized as the activity of creating and exchanging sexually explicit or implicit text messages, photos and/or videos through smartphones. This article adopts the definition with full knowledge that sexting has been defined variously in prior academic studies depending on contexts, content and forms in which it occurs (Doring, 2014). Most scholars concur that sexting incorporates digital recording of nude and/or semi-nude images and/or videos and distributing such content via online channels such as email, instant messaging or social network systems such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Myspace and YouTube (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012; Baumgartner, Sumter, Peter, Valkenburg & Livingstone, 2014; Walrave, Heirman & Hallam, 2014; Poltash, 2013; Eraker, 2010).

Though scholars such as the ones mentioned have described wide range of behaviours, definitions, motivations and contexts of sexting, they have rarely analysed or commented on how sexting is related to transactional sex. A number of studies done in Kenya have illuminated on transactional sexual relationships in different contexts (Robinson & Yeh, 2011; Stoebenau, Heise, Wamoyi & Bobrova, 2017; Muchomba, 2014), but none of them have taken a dimension that examines how such relationships relates to sexting. This study therefore sought to shed some light on this important context of sexting.

The term 'transactional sexting' has been coined and conceptualized as one that involve creating and sending sexually explicit/implicit content in contexts of transactional/inter-generational sexual relationships. In media commentaries, young girls and, sometimes, boys

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in colleges and universities in Kenya are said to be involved in transactional relationships with mostly older partners (Nyawira, 2019; Oimbo, 2018). However, no studies have explored this phenomenon. A 'sponsor' is a 'wealthy' man involved in transactional relationship with a young woman. Similarly, a 'cougar' is an (old) woman involved in a similar relationship with a younger man. These relationships are usually consensual and transactional in nature, meaning the person who occupies the inferior position derives economic gains in exchange of sexual satisfaction to the 'maintainer' of the relationship.

Smartphones have provided the functionalities to create and exchange sexual content (sexting) with ease. In fact, sexting through mobile phones has become a trend among young and older generations (Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet & Peeters, 2016; Stephen, 2017). This has changed and introduced new terrains (contexts) in which this digital activity occurs, but research has not documented all these contexts. Some of these terrains (contexts) are emerging and others could be more complex than what previous academic scholars envisage. Sexting in relation to transactional exchanges and relationships is one such area that scholars have not adequately explored.

Previous research evidence tends to show a link between sexting and sexual, health and social problems. Sexting has been associated with increased sexual activities among its practitioners and social harms related to humiliation and damage of reputation in case of escalated sexting (Ringrose *et al*., 2012; Cooper, Quayle, Jonsson & Svedin, 2016). Transactional sex is associated with social and health risks that are known to occur when one engages in sexual activities, like dangers of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, abortion, dropping out from school and more (Njue, Voeten, Evelia, Ohuma, Looman, Habbema & Askew, 2015). When sexting becomes intertwined with transactional sex, it does not only become complex to address challenges of either sexting or transactional sex, but makes efforts to design intervention programmes more challenging as well. In fact, sexting followed by unprotected sex are more likely to happen in commercialized sex encounters because of the power dynamics. This illustrates where the challenge lies when it comes to addressing issues associated with sexting and transactional sex, especially when women are the victims. Therefore, it is important to understand how sexting occurs in trans-generational sex contexts. This way, scholars would be in a position

to devise relevant programmes and approaches to address the issues imposed by the merge of two presumably problematic sex issues.

Theoretical Reflections
When studying sexting, scholars have tended to operate within existing theoretical frameworks, assumptions, methodological perspectives and literature in order to interpret, discuss and understand issues relating to this problematic youth sexual phenomenon. For decades, researchers have investigated and documented youth consumption of sexual messages received through watching TV and reading magazines and other print media (Manganello, Henderson, Jordan & Trentacoste, 2010). However, with the introduction of internet and related technologies, mediated communication has become the central focus with reference to exchange of explicit content. The reason some of these 'new' and emerging communication media have attracted scholarship is because they have converted young people from being consumers to producers of explicit/implicit content. For example, the growth of mobile phones and the power of their communicative characteristics, which is the main focus of this article, has produced complex media communication patterns and behaviours in all spheres of human interaction. As pointed out earlier, mobile phones have become the *de facto* tools for creation and exchange of sexual content.

Scientific studies that have analysed sexting mostly make reference to theories, concepts, assumptions and literature on gender and power dynamics (Ringrose *et al*., 2012; Hasinoff, 2013), sexual expression, exploration and sexual identity formation (Boyd, 2011) legal ramifications (Eraker, 2010), appropriation of technologies (Grimus, 2014; Phippen, 2012), pornification of culture (Walrave *et al*., 2014; Walker, Sanci & Temple-Smith, 2013), queer times and spaces (Halberstam, 2005) , with sharp focus on modernity and consumerism, and peer influence (Sasson & Mesch, 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). This article makes heavy reference to these dominant frameworks, especially gender and power structures, peer influence, modernity and consumerism. The next sections expound on these theoretical frameworks and assumptions

A number of scholars explicate how social norms within peer groups and romantic partners serve as strong sources of pressure and influence to engage in sexting (Drouin, Vogel, Surbey & Stills, 2013; Walrave *et al*., 2014). Assumptions about the extent to which peers influence behaviour of others are largely illustrated in Social

Norms Theory and other frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The Social Norms Theory, first suggested by Perkins and Berkowitz (1986), presumes that our behaviour is influenced by misconceptions of how other members of the social group think and act. The theory predicts that when individuals overestimate problematic behaviours of others they will engage more in the behaviour. The researcher has observed that peer influence results from the perceptions of what others believe and do ("the perceived norm") more than their actual beliefs and actions (the "actual norm"). The difference between "perceived" and "actual" is what creates misconceptions and its effects on behaviour is what explains the social norms approach. Social norms are certain behaviours prescribed by members of a given social group and members of that group are expected to perform these behaviours in order to belong to the group (Burchell, Rettie & Patel, 2013; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Social norms are instrumental in predicting social behaviours (Ferguson, 2011).

Quantitative studies have reported sexting to be high among the youth (Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski & Zimmerman, 2013). Possibly, the urge to conform to social norms by the youth may be a pointer to the high rates of sexting. Social norms are part of the wide contextual socio-cultural factors. The Social Norms Theory predicts that the widely held misconceptions may encourage the youth to engage in sexting in an attempt to conform to perceived norms (Hasinoff, 2014; Eraker, 2010; Judge, 2012). This article assumes that college students may overestimate their peers' levels and nature of sexting activities and these subjective assumptions are likely to increase sexting activities among. This is especially because sensitive and private issues such as sexting are rarely discussed openly and, therefore, the possibility of gathering misconceptions about others who engage in sexting is high. Sasson and Mesch (2014) used the social theory to study risky online behaviours, including sexting, and these studies increase the theory's validity and relevance in the study of online behaviours.

Related to peer pressure, some scholars believe that young people engage in sexting to attain social status among peers (Ringrose *et al.*, 2012). Social status may be interpreted as a way of modern sophistication, characterized by admiration and perceived higher social recognition among one's social group. Tade and Adekoya (2012) posit that modernity and consumerism have greatly influenced young people to engage in transactional sex, which is the focus of this article. Another way to interpret this is that, due to modernity, the youth consider the level of sophistication, status, respect and influence among one's peers on the basis of materials possessions. Walrave *et al*. (2014) contrast peer pressure as a reason for sexting with alternative sentiments that sexting could be a way for young people to rebel against the dominant social norms. Their assumptions corroborate the views of some scholars who suggest that 'queer time and space' could be useful frameworks for analysing both cultural and political changes in the modern and postmodern times (Halberstam, 2005).

Queer time and space frameworks may explain the emergence of queer sex subcultures which have developed in contrary to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction. Sexting in transactional relationships might be considered an emerging social behaviour. Emerging and perceived less-deviant social labels, such as 'sponsor', in contrast to more deviant sugar mummy and sugar daddy labels could also be interpreted as signs of increasing contention with transactional sex in society. Presently, it might be easier for a girl to say to her friends or sisters that she has a 'sponsor'. In fact, she might be respected for exploiting her coital capital to establish a social capital (Tade & Adekoya, 2012). Modern ways of expressing sexuality seem to combine sexiness, beauty and social attractiveness with the bargain for social recognition, status and attention.

Gender dynamics are said to be one of the reasons for the unequal power distribution between the males and the females. According this perspective, there is unequal power distribution on the way sexting activities are practiced and negotiated among the males and female sexters. Just like in normal sexual relations, males hold a senior position in sexting relationships compared to the females (Phippen, 2012). Social perceptions about sexting, therefore, differ depending on the gender of the sender (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose *et al*., 2012; Dobson, 2011). For instance, males are in most cases applauded while girls are labelled 'sluts' when both groups engage in sexting (Ringrose *et al*., 2012; Hasinoff, 2013). Gender stereotypes are usually manifested in the way male and female adolescents interact through sexting (Wood, 2013). This gendered sexual double standard forms a dominant discourse and point of reference when addressing sexting in relation to power relations (Albury, Crawford, Byron & Mathews, 2013; Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Doring, 2014; Englander, 2012). Consequently, the gendered sexual double

standard mentality makes it interesting to explore sexting behaviours and norms from a gendered perspective. Hasinoff (2013) argues that girls experience all manner of discrimination and, for this reason, struggle to express sexual desires and also lack powers to negotiate safer sexual practices.

Another way sexting is analysed within power relations is when girls are said to experience pressure from boys to record and send explicit images and videos, especially in intimate relationships (Englander, 2012; Gordon Messer *et al.*, 2013; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones & Wolak, 2012; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2014; Schubert & Wurf, 2014; Lenhart, 2009; Lippmann & Campbell, 2014; Henderson, 2011). Gendered perceptions are also instrumental in understanding how girls and boys negotiate online sexual interactions. Some studies on the use of social media concluded that young people represent themselves in a gendered stereotypical way. In the Kenyan context, most communities predominantly maintain a patriarchal power structure (Nielson, 2019). As a result, social interactions are gendered and, therefore, men are likely to yield more power in intimate and dating relationships. This might as well apply to sexting in same age and inter-generational sexting interactions.

Transactional Sex and Sexting
Studies conducted in Africa indicate that transactional sexual relationships, characterized by exchange of sexual favours for monetary compensation or receipt of gifts, are a likely behaviour among young people and older generations (Mumah, Kabiru, Izugbara & Mukiira, 2014; Robinson & Yeh, 2011; Tade & Adekoya, 2012). Limited economic opportunities for poverty eradication and stunted social economic development have been cited as reasons transactional sex and other economic motivated relationships thrive in Africa (Maticka-Tyndale, Gallant, Brouillard-Coyle, Holland, Metcalfe, Wildish & Gichuru, 2005). Quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in Kenya suggest that young people could engage in transactional sex to receive money, gifts or other favours (Robinson & Yeh, 2011; Stoebenau et al, 2017; Mumah *et al.*, 2014). Peer pressure and higher social status achieved as a result of acquiring expensive things such as smartphones, clothing, jewellery and more motivate young people to engage in commercial sex (Ajayi, Nwokocha, Akpan, Adeniyi & Goon, 2017; Tade & Adekoya, 2012). A study conducted among formal and informal sex workers in Busia, Kenya, found that the rate of sex in exchange for money increased as the financial need increased (Robinson & Yeh, 2011).

Further, literature indicates that women are more likely to engage in transactional sex than men because of their position in the social economic status as dictated by power dynamics (Booysen & Summerton, 2002; Robinson & Yeh, 2011). Apart from poverty and adverse conditions, other factors are also likely to motivate people to engage in transactional sex. For example, Clark, Kabiru and Mathur (2010) concluded that besides financial reasons, physical attraction motivates women to date rich men. Herper, Riplinger, Neubauer, Murphy, Velcoff and Bangi (2013) also posit that transactional sex is multi-dimensional when participants in their study mentioned "need for survival and desire for social status" as reasons for being involved in transactional relationships (p. 8).

Nowadays, men also are venturing into transactional relationships more than previously reported. They date 'cougars' in exchange for economic gains and expensive lifestyles. Nevertheless, only scanty qualitative studies exist that examine how young men engage in transactional sex in exchange for gifts or money (Nyanzi, Pool & Kinsman, 2001). It seems the power balance is shifting where more women are becoming independent, economically empowered, yield more negotiating power than before, and, as such, opt to live without a long-term sexual partner. This has possibly resulted in the increasing number of unmarried women. Some of these women are possibly looking for men to date. It seems they prefer men who do not threaten or match their financial merit in order to maintain their power status. Chatterji, Murray, London and Anglewicz (2004) found that unmarried women more likely to engage in sexual intercourse with more partners than do married women.

Engaging in sex in order to receive monetary compensation or gifts has always attracted negative social labels (Tade & Adekoya, 2012). In Kenya, the social labels used to refer to transactional sex have evolved. For example, not too long ago people tended to use, and sometimes still do, the words 'sugar daddies' and 'sugar mummies' for men and women, respectively, who paid younger people for sex. The label 'sponsor' has replaced the more negative and deviant 'sugar-daddy' label. The acceptance of these perceived less-deviant social labels could be an indicator of society's rising tolerance with prostitution and transactional relationships. As pointed out earlier, the shifting perceptions of transactional sexual relationships could be explained in the context of

modernity and consumerism cultures. It seems that the modern youth consider the level of sophistication, status, respect and influence among their peers on the basis of materials possessions. For example, young girls might experience social stigma when peers talk about expensive items they have acquired after dating sponsors. To cope with the social stigma and match up the perceived peer difference, some girls might also seek for 'sponsors'. Tade and Adekoya (2012) posit that modernity and consumerism have greatly influenced young people's engagement in transactional sex. In some societies, giving gifts (money) after receiving sex is the expected form of appreciation. For instance, Nyanzi *et al.* (2001) found that women in Uganda withhold sexual favours to their transactional sex partners to increase the amount of gifts expected.

As earlier mentioned, studies are non-existent that connect sharing self-made sexual content with transactional sex. Though not supported by any empirical data, some forms of sexting seem to be related to transactional sex and prostitution. For instance, a number of websites such as *nairobihot.com*, *nairobisweet.com* and others contain raunchy or naked images/videos of women advertising prostitution services. Sexting is related to sensation, attention seeking and peer recognition (Ringrose *et al.*, 2012). Social pressure from men/boys is likely to make some girls to, on their own volition, record and post explicit images/videos to satisfy the perceived wider social expectations and norms regarding women's beauty, sexuality and sexiness. 'Socialites' and celebrities like musicians and actors post racy images and videos of themselves on social media and instant messaging systems to attract fame and attention (Chege & Wanjiru, 2017). It is believed that some girls became popular and, therefore, attracted male attention when they shared naked images/videos online. For instance, it is reported that the Kenyan socialite, Vera Sidika, rose to fame when she posted her explicit images/videos on social media. Similarly, young girls craving for male attention and who believe such attention would make them famous are likely to record and post raunchy images/videos on social media (Chege & Wanjiru, 2017).

Method of Study

The study adopted a qualitative approach, generating data from sixty-five (65) students using non-probability sampling technique. To draw individual students to constitute the sample, we started by purposively sampling five middle level colleges in Nairobi, Kenya. Then, purposive sampling strategy utilizing both purposive and snowball designs was used to select students who engaged in sexting in order to gain depth and richness of data. Purposive sampling was used to identify the primary participants. Additionally, during interviews the primary participants were requested to trace and recruit more participants who they knew were involved in sexting. Thirty in-depth interviews (11 males, 19 females; N=30) and seven focus group discussions (N=35) were conducted with the selected participants. Potential participants for inclusion in the sample were students aged 18 years to 25 years who were actively involved in sexting via mobile phones. Only one female participant had earlier indicated to be within the target age bracket, and she clarified that she was 26 years old during the interview.

The study endeavoured to explore sexting behaviours from a sample of students from diverse social, academic and religious backgrounds. The diverse characteristics that were taken into consideration included: gender, course, location of the college, religion, year of study, dating status, age, residence (living alone, living with students, living in hostels and residence, etc.). These formed important characteristics fused in the presentation of findings for this study. Details of sample characteristics were as presented in Table 1. Due to the nature of the study, codes were used to identify the colleges and participants.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	[KM]	[HR]	[DM]	]VI]	[KP]	Total
N=65	9	11	15	12	18	**65**
Gender						
Male	4	3	6	6	8	**27**
Female	5	8	9	6	10	**38**
Interviews	3	5	6	6	10	**30**
Focus Group Discussions	6	6	12	6	12	**35**
Course Taken in College						
Mass communication	2				2	**4**
CPA (Accountancy)			3	5		**8**
Automotive Engineering					1	**1**
Architecture					3	**3**
Electrical and Electronics Engineering					2	**2**
Civil Engineering					1	**1**
Purchasing & Supplies Management/Procurement	1	5	3		3	**12**
Hospitality Management					2	**2**
Community Development/Social Work			4			**4**
Public Health			2		2	**4**
Human Resources Management		6				**6**
International Fleet Management				4	2	**6**
Business Management/Administration	6		3	3		**12**
Relationship status						
Dating/In a relationship	4	7	6	8	8	**34**
Married					2	**2**
Dating multiple people				1	2	**3**
Non-dating	5	4	8	3	6	**26**
Religion						
Christian	7	11	14	11	15	**58**
Muslim	2		1		2	**5**
None					1	**1**
Both Christian and Muslim				1		**1**
Residence /Living Arrangement						
Live with both parents	3	3	3	3	6	**18**
Live with one parent/Single parent	2	3	4	2	3	**14**
Live with non-parent(Relative/Siblings/Spouse)	1	1	2	2	4	**10**
Live with non-parent(Non-family member)			1	1		**2**
Non parent (orphaned)					1	**1**
Live in hostel	1	3	1	1	1	**7**
Live alone/rented room	2	1	4	3	3	**13**

The FGDs and interviews were conducted in the college premises when the students were available (had a free slot in the class attendance schedule) to avoid interfering with lessons. The interviews lasted between 45 and 125 minutes. Each FGD comprised five to seven members. Two FGDs were conducted in two of the colleges (DM & KP). Focus group attendance was influenced by conversancy with sexting, availability of the students and gender dynamics. Girls felt embarrassed to articulate issues on sexting, which made boys automatically dominate the conversations in some of the FGDs. Therefore, one FDG comprising girls only was conducted. The FGD lasted between 75 and 107 minutes. Interview and FGD guides were developed to assist the researchers on the areas to elucidate responses during the conversations. With permission of the participants, their feedback was were audio-recorded using a digital audio-recorder. The interviews and FGDs audio data were then transcribed verbatim using the Listen N Write transcription software. The transcribed data was then coded and thematically analysed by

reading through it. The common themes were used to organize the findings guided by the objectives of the study. The final report of the findings which contained triangulation of the interview and FGD data, enriched with direct quotes from the participants, was constructed. Thematic analysis allowed the researchers to unravel the patterns of experiences, perspectives and activities across the reported data sets.

Key Findings
'Sponsor' and 'Cougar' Relationships as Currency and Socially Acceptable among Young People

Participants suggested that transactional sexual relationships are widespread and socially accepted among college students. Dating 'sponsors' was found to be influenced by several factors, but the desire to have money was cited as the most likely reason young people engaged in such relationships. Besides monetary gains, participants also mentioned desire to acquire expensive lifestyles, clothing and smartphones. Some female participants mentioned inadequate economic support from their parents as a factor that pushed girls into looking for 'sponsors' who chipped in to supplement their budgets. Female participants further observed that girls who dated sponsors were able to acquire expensive items which their parents could afford. One girls noted, *"Yeah many females, they talk about that, they have sponsors and they talk about them a lot, my sponsor bought this and that, I'm having lunch with my sponsor, I'm doing this with my sponsor yeah is common among girls"* (F18INT). Modernity and consumerism seems to have created an urge for young people to covet items that are perceived to make someone look sophisticated and of a higher social status. Unfortunately, some of the young people come from humble family backgrounds that cannot afford to buy these items. There was a feeling that peer influence and desire to look sophisticated among one's colleagues were likely to encourage students in colleges to engage in commercial sexual relationships. For example, when girls show expensive items to their colleagues and get appreciated or admired, they would continue doing what they do to get those items or else influence their friends to look for sponsors. It was noted that girls who confessed to having dated sponsors or desired to date sponsors had female colleagues involved in such relationships. One girl mentioned how she admired a colleague who dated a rich man to the extent of advising her on how to invest the money she had

received, *".....there was a day she lost a phone and after sometime she came with IPhone, ok I tried to talk to her.... you should at least invest the money he gives you on something but she said how will people know I have a sponsor if I don't have expensive things…"* (F6INT).

Group communication via instant messaging was described as a great source of influence and important channel through which girls talked about topics relating to money-motivated relationships. These were mostly girls only 'private sex chat groups' and a number of girls indicated being members of such closely-knit virtual communities. One of the female participants narrated how in their WhatsApp (sex) private chat groups they talked about monetary gains accrued from dating sponsors:

> *Interviewee: exactly money we do discuss although it is not most of the time, when we consider a man we consider money in terms of sponsors you see, ok like when you send let's say if you go to the part of money, mostly we discuss it in terms of sponsors, ok how much does this sponsor have, as in how can he take care of you, see, yeah ladies talk about sponsors in these groups* (F4INT).

Though they said such cases were uncommon, the participants were keen to note that some young college boys dated older women fondly known as 'cougars'. These boys received nice things from the cougars in return for sex. This was said to happen if the boy had 'abs', and was handsome. As one male participant observed,*".… they (women) will keep you smart because they have the money to keep you smart and they have all what it takes to make you look good for them…"* (M1INT). Health concerns, particularly fear of contracting dangerous sexually transmitted diseases, emerged as one of the issues some boys did not like about cougar relationships. A male participant narrated how his friend contracted a sexually transmitted disease from what he claimed to be an illicit relationship with an old lady. Earlier in the interview, he described how a certain old landlady in *Umoja* showed interest in dating him with a promise of paying his house rent:

> *Interviewee: the guy got gonorrhoea and he suffered a lot, backbone pain up to date he suffers, then, yeah he is my good friend, we grew up together in Mai Mahiu*

and so he became mentally ill seriously not really ill but he is not ….
Interviewer: You assume he got gonorrhoea from this woman?
Interviewee: Yeah (M1INT)

Besides the desire to acquire material things, some female participants suggested that some girls were involved in transactional relationships for sexual satisfaction. It seemed that besides sexual pleasure, some girls dated sponsors for sexual pleasure because older men were perceived to be more skilled and 'less strong' compared to younger males. A female participant involved in a transactional sex said that she preferred to have sex with older men compared to boys of her age. She said she feared that boys of her age have too much sexual stamina because they were sexually starved and would, therefore, damage the private parts of a girl while having sex:

> *Interviewer: Why don't you get or have a boyfriend?*
> *Interviewee: No these young boys want sex too much, they are sexual starved, they can destroy your private parts because of sexual starvation* (laughs loudly), *yeah true these boys are starved, I don't joke with them, these boys in college they are sex hungry, they can destroy your body,* (inaudible) *they can use you so badly yeah, they will have sex with you as if they will not have sex again, yeah they can destroy your private parts* (laughs) (female participant).

Merger of Sexting and Transactional Sex

Participants who commented on commercial relationships unanimously suggested that dating a 'sponsor' or 'cougar' for economic gain was intertwined with recording and sending of one's nude or sexually suggestive images/videos. These participants were keen to note that in 'sponsor' relationships, it is mostly the girl who shared her naked images because of pressure from the man to send the images. According to participants, in cougar relationships it is the woman who mostly shares her naked images to seduce the young man. A number of female participants felt that old partners usually experienced thrill by looking at explicit images of their young partners, something they could not comfortably do with their matrimonial partners:

> *Interviewer: Do these girls say whether the sponsors ask for their nude images/videos?*
> *Interviewee: Yeah they do, yeah, I have heard one girl say her sponsor asked for nude images, you know they want to do things with these girls that they don't do with their wives, so they just ask the girls to send the nudes, some girls send them for the sake of the money* (F18INT).

As earlier noted, some participants said they discussed with colleagues about sponsor relationships. In these online or offline conversations, they noted that they even showed each other explicit content received from their older partners. A female participant consented to having been shown naked images of a 'cougar' sent to a young man: *I saw one, the woman showing the man everything* (FG05). The male participant who had earlier admitted to having had a male colleague who dated an old woman also claimed to have looked at naked images showing private parts, derriere, thighs and bare breasts sent by the older woman:

> *The only thing this women can send you in the morning is her thighs, boobs, vagina, ass and such, I used to go to my friends phone, I won't lie, check, I would see the woman's ass, her face, boob, vagina and I asked him really what are they for……?* (M1INT).

Though he seemed much aware of how young men were lured into dating older women, another male participant admitted to having received requests to send his naked images from a 37-year old woman, as he explains:

> *Interviewer: You mean females have requested you to send them your naked photos?*
> *Interviewee: Yeah many females, not even college students only, I have had this from even people, working people out there, older than me, I say, I'm around 24 years, I have had someone 37 years requesting for my naked photo yeah…* (M4INT).

Similarly, a female participant recounted how a man she had met in an office, who she estimated to be 50 years old, had sent her airtime and subsequently requested to send what she suspected were her raunchy images:

Yeah let me give my own experience, there was this man who is about 50 years, we just met in an office somewhere, one day he grabbed my phone, dialled his phone number and then my number got into his phone .... started sending airtime and initially he did not ask for anything but it reached a point he started asking for pictures but he started asking for normal pictures, I told him I don't take pictures at night, he used to request for my picture when I'm sleeping, I wondered what pictures he wanted from.......sponsors must definitely ask for nudes images/videos (female participant).

The female participant involved in transactional relationships with older men validated the sentiments of these participants. In her revelations, she acknowledged having constantly sent her nude images to the old men she dated. She also said that her female friends involved in these kinds of relationships as well shared their naked images with older men:

Interviewer: Does your sponsor ask you to send your nude images to him?
Interviewee: Yeah very much (laughs) *very much he asks for my nudes a lot.*
Interviewer: What does he want to see in the nude images?
Interviewee: .... but I send him without showing my face yeah, I hide the face, ok I show him my pussy (*private* parts) *and boobs yeah* (F7INT).

She also talked about the precaution of hiding the face when exposing her naked images to the 'sponsors'. She did this in case the images were shared with other people or sent to public networks, hence she could exonerate herself and most likely deny being the one shown in the images:

Interviewer: Why do you hide the face?
Interviewee: (laughs) *You don't know which phone will receive that nude image or who will be shown that picture, so when you hide the face one can't prove it is you even if he knows you, without the face you cannot tell the person for the example the boobs are the same may be the size* (F7INT).

The girl also mentioned that she also received naked photographs showing male genitals from the men she was involved with in transactional relationships. These images were meant to spice up the affairs:

Interviewer: Do sponsors send you their nude images?
Interviewee: Yeah they send the private part
Interviewer: When does he send his nude images?
Interviewee: Before you have sex with him
Interviewer: Do sponsors continue to send their nude images after sex?
Interviewee: Ok some continue sending they don't get tired (F7INT)

As this extract explicates, one girl said she allowed 'sponsors' to take images of her naked body but she was keen to note that the images must be devoid of the face to protect her dignity in case the images 'leaked':

Interviewer: Do they capture your face?
Interviewee: No they only take around my waist and buttocks, they don't capture my face
Interviewer: What if they insist on taking your whole nude body?
Interviewee: No, no I cannot allow nothing like taking the face
Interviewer: Do you look at these images?
Interviewee: Yeah I must see them (F7INT)

Besides sharing images/videos, the girl noted that she received text messages with very strong sexual language and *nasty* words from sponsors, especially during the day when the man was interested in sex. She reckoned that the language used in the text messages was usually disrespectful and demeaning:

Interviewer: When do you chat with sponsors?
Interviewee: During the day, most of them have no respect, they don't even say hi they just text and ask you 'unaniletea kuma lini' [when are you coming for sex] or may be text you and ask you 'unakuja kunyonya ball lini' [when are you coming to perform oral sex on me], yeah such

things, they cannot use respectful language.
Interviewer: When does the sponsor start using the disrespectful language?
Interviewee: Ok, when you are new to him he is ok, but when you stay with him for some time, yeah when you have sex with him he starts using abusive language on you (F7INT).

Discussion

Study findings described above suggest that exchange of explicit images/videos or text messages, which are generated by the sender, take place in transactional relationships. We have coined the words '*transactional sexting*' to denote this phenomenon. This article argues that transactional sex is a complex social issue and goes beyond exchange of sex for monetary gains. Transactional sex is related to peer-social pressure and desire for recognition, organization of power and acquisition of material possessions in society. Research findings revealed that peer pressure and pressure from transactional partners may influence many aspects of sexting behaviours among college students. Students who interact with peers who endorse or engage in sexting with transactional partners are likely to learn values and norms that trigger the desire to engage in such behaviours. Qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrate that sexting behaviours exhibited by young people are likely to have been influenced by social pressure and perceived attitudes of peer groups and romantic partners (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Van Ouytsel *et al*., 2016; Walker, Sanci & Temple-Smith, 2013; Ringrose *et al*., 2013). We cannot overrule the possibly that students in colleges overestimate the sexting activities of their colleagues and other people in transactional relationships. We observed that participants frequently alluded to remarks such as 'everybody is doing' and sexting is 'common in relationships'. Majority of participants portrayed sexting as common when they mentioned colleagues who engaged in the activity with romantic partners.

Over time, society has placed more relevance on masculine than feminine ideals. This has created imbalances and inequalities in material possessions and power relations. As noted earlier, the power balance could be shifting where women yearn to be economically empowered and independent. It seems that the desire to close the power and material gap for women might have created a basis for transactional sex and other aggressive economic ventures. This could be coupled with the diminishing masculinity owing to the recent overemphasis on the 'girl child' at the expense of the 'boy child'. Women in transactional sex strive to gain power and resources and in a way challenge the existing patriarchal structures (Tade & Adekoya, 2012).

Modernity and consumerism have altered interpretations of norms, ideals and values. For example, nowadays society places more value on money and material things than on chastity, academic excellence, honesty, patriotism, etc. It is possible that a virgin girl would be stigmatized among peers of 'sophisticated' girls dating 'sponsors' and enjoying the comfort derived from expensive rewards. Sugar-daddy and sugar mummy syndrome is no longer stigmatized. Therefore, young people in 'sponsor' and cougar relationships no longer have to contend with negative social labels like being branded prostitutes or weak men. The accommodation of neutral or less-deviant social labels implies that the modern society has to a large extent accepted the phenomenon of transactional sex.

This article presumes that when young people, who are already in transactional relationships, create and share sexual images/videos, the implications are going to be twofold. One, the frequency of sexual intercourse in these relationships is likely to increase. Researchers have found naked images/videos as used to arouse and sexually stimulate people into coercive or consensual sexual activity (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012). When young people share explicit images with the intention of catching the attention or arousing a transactional partner, this is likely to increase the rate of transactional sex and prostitution as well as sexting.

As pointed out earlier, when sexting takes a dimension where it is closely connected with transactional sex and other money-motivated contexts, it be challenging to address problems associated with both sexting and transactional sex. It then becomes complex because both sexting and transactional sex are associated with almost similar sexual and health problems. It is also likely to be double tragedy for women since they tend to hold inferior positions in both sexting and transactional sex. Studies show that women experience pressure and blackmail to sext from men (Ringrose *et al*., 2012; Van Ouytsel *et al.*, 2016). As pointed out earlier, Kenya is a patriarchal society (Nielson, 2019). As such, people are likely to apply gender principles when negotiating roles in sexual relationships. Subsequently, it is expected that women in transactional relationships would be disadvantaged by gender roles and power position, and hence would yield little or no power to

negotiate the direction of exchange of self-made sexting content, and safe or protected sex (Robinson & Yeh, 2011).

Conclusion

We consider this study to be among the pioneer ones in Kenya to illuminate on the connection between sexting and transactional sexual relationships, especially from experiences and perspectives on those with first information on sexting. Specifically, this study contributes to existing knowledge on sexting and its connection with transactional sex among college students in Kenya. We have devised the terms *'transactional sexting'* to describe this connection.

The connection between transactional sex and sexting is complex and multifaceted. Understanding *transactional sexting* requires scholars to illuminate beyond money-motivated reasons for transactional sexting among young people. Consumerism, lifestyle, changing culture, peer-social norms, values and sexuality, technology and representation of self in the contemporary 'pornified' society could be used to understand and contextualize sexting in transactional sex. Paradoxically, the changing cultural and technological values do not seem to disrupt or challenge the existing and deep rooted gender and power structures. What technology has done is to 'emancipate' girls to produce and express sexiness, beauty and sexual desires in a misogynist society. This form of expression does not in any way equate to power and agency; it only reinforces the masculine construction of female sexuality, which is dangerous because men can disempower, manipulate and control girls/women by making them victims of their own sexual expression. This can happen, for instance, through non-consensual distribution of private content shared in transactional sex.

This article proposes that society should initiate and embrace strategies that promote or challenge existing ideologies that banish women and youth to inferior positions in the economic systems and power hierarchies. The article suggests frameworks that create 'empowering' opportunities in employment, economic activities, family and community for women and the youth. Moreover, the government and other stakeholders should devise intervention programmes to equip the youth with skills on how to harness positive opportunities afforded by emerging technological advancements. To address the complex health and psychological problems that are likely to emerge as a result of sexting and transactional sex among students, there is need for counselling and educational programmes that promote development of positive behaviour, prevent sexting/and or transactional sex(ting) and challenge negative peer-social norms. Government, educationists and related stakeholders should devise and oversee implementation of such initiatives in institutions of higher learning and other spheres of social interactions. These programmes should particularly include students (young people) acting as peer support systems, peer counsellors and ambassadors of positive peer-social behaviour development

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