Institution: Plymouth University

Unit of Assessment: 25 Education

Title of case study: Sexting and Websex by UK children and young people

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study demonstrates the impact generated through research studies at Plymouth University into 'sexting', the self-generation and distribution of explicit images, by children and young people. The findings have informed briefing material for Ofsted inspectors, been used to develop material for schools, and led to schools developing new curriculum based support and peer mentoring. The research has also extended the understanding of the emerging issues and helped inform national debate and public discourse.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

This case study describes research studies into 'sexting' undertaken by Prof. Andy Phippen at Plymouth University (Lecturer from 2001-2006, Senior Lecturer 2006-2010, Prof 2011- to present). The research emerged from concerns regarding the practice of sexting – the sharing of explicit images electronically - and sought to to better understand the ways young people from 11 to 18 use mobile and Internet technology to share files among friends. Its technical basis was developed in association with staff in the School of Computing and Mathematics (UoAs 10 and 11).

Sexting is an issue that affects the lives of children and young people. It can do long term reputational damage and, in more serious cases, extreme bullying and suicide have resulted. In this first large study into the sexting phenomena in the UK, Phippen explored the prevalence of the practice of "sexting", the self generation and distribution of explicit images by children and young people in the UK. The study was commissioned in 2009 by the South West Grid for Learning, a leading online safety charity in the UK (now part of the UK Safer Internet Centre).

Data were collected through an online survey administered in schools across the South West. The survey aimed to inform understanding about image and video sharing among young people and contribute to improving measures for protecting individuals from the harm that can occur. The survey was developed with support from Barnardos and engaged parents, teachers, and children. The data collection was carried out between September and November 2009. A total sample of 1,150 children completed the survey across 30 schools.

The research found that young people are very confident in the use of digital technology to take and distribute images/videos with 79% of respondents saying they used such digital technologies for these purposes. The research into young people's attitudes also found that 40% did not see anything wrong with viewing a topless image, and 15% did not take issue with naked images. The research found that sexting is prevalent among young people, with around 40% saying they knew friends who carried out such practice and over a quarter (27%) reporting that sexting happens regularly or all the time. Almost a third of respondents (30%) knew people who had been adversely affected by sexting, while only 24% said they would turn to a teacher for help if they were affected by issues related to sexting.

The second study in the programme of research (commissioned again by the South West Grid for Learning 2012) was a qualitative study involving 12 focus groups with year 9 pupils (aged 13--14) pupils in 6 different schools across 3 counties. In addition three exploratory focus groups were held with year 6 (aged 10--11) in two different schools. In total the study undertook research with 150 young people. This research, supported by the UK Safer Internet Centre and the NSPCC, revealed new concerns and trends in sexting amongst teenagers. The study concluded that sexting is considered almost routine for many 13-14 year olds and that while young people think that issues around sexualised online content (both pornography and self-generated content) should be discussed in school they are unwilling to turn to adults for help due to fear of being judged. It also found that younger children (10-11 years olds) are still largely safe from exposure to sexualised content.

Following the sexting research, Prof Phippen was approached by BBC Current Affairs to conduct some further research into the use of technology in relationships in a slightly older demographic group (16-24). This research explored attitudes to technology in relationships by this demographic group and also explored how mainstream this was.

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3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

"Should We Do It Just Because We Can? Methodological and Ethical Implications for Information Revelation in Online Social Networks", A.Phippen, R. Davey and S. Furnell. *Methodological Innovations Online* Vol 4 No.3., December 2009. Methodological Innovations Online is an international open access, peer reviewed social research journal.

Preventative actions for enhancing online protection and privacy, Furnell, S., Phippen, A., Von Solms, R. *International Journal for Information Technologies and Systems Approach*. Vol. 4 No. 2. June 2011. The journal is a refereed, international journal on applied and theoretical research, aimed at providing coverage by both scholars and practitioners in the field of information systems.

S. Atkinson, S. Furnell, A. Phippen, "Securing the Next Generation: Enhancing e-safety Awareness Among Young People", *Computer Fraud and Security*, Issue 7: 13-19, (2009). International, peer-reviewed journal providing research to effectively manage and control computer and information security.

Phippen, A. (2012) Sharing Personal Images and Videos Among Young People. Commissioned report for South West Grid for Learning. This report went through a rigorous quality review process with experts in this area including the Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre, Head of Education at Child Exploitation and Online Protection (part of UK Law Enforcement), eSafety lead for Plymouth City Council and Head of Child Protection at Barnados.

Phippen, Andy (2012) Sexting: an exploration of practices, attitudes and influences. London: NSPCC and UK Safer Internet Centre. This report went through a detailed review process with experts prior to publication including Director of UK Safer Internet Centre, Head of strategy and child protection at the NSPCC, Chief Executive of Childnet International, Chief Executive of the Marie Collins Foundation and Head of Social Care at South Gloucester Council.

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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research has extended the understanding of the emerging issues and helped inform national debate and public discourse. The research formed part of the evidence within the cross-party Parliamentary Inquiry into the current state of online child protection. Eight key recommendations to enhance child safety on line were produced as part of this Enquiry including better support for internet safety education and initiatives. Following on from this, the Prime Minister appointed Claire Perry MP as his special advisor on preventing sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood. One of the areas will be improving education for parents and children about safety and technology. Prof. Phippen has advised Claire Perry MP on the research findings as part of her role.

All of the research studies have received wide interest from the media and have impacted upon debate and understanding outside of academia. Coverage in the UK has been in The *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Independent* while international coverage has also been extensive. The research on behalf of BBC Current Affairs resulted in the documentary "Websex: Where's the Harm", which was broadcast on BBC3 in January 2012.

The research has impacted on schools, particularly those that have taken part in the research studies or subsequently contacted Prof. Phippen for advice and support. The research has provided a foundation for practitioners to develop lessons and teaching resources around sexting that aim to reduce the incidence of risky behaviours. The research findings have been used by the Child Online Exploitation Unit to develop a film called 'Exposed' along with teaching resources for use in schools. These are freely available on their website and are suitable for young people, schools and parents to use.

Several schools have reviewed their approach to technology and safety, some have changed their PSHE curriculum while others have introduced new processes of support including a peer mentoring programme. As the Head at Worle Community School, Somerset stated "*Our work with Andy last year allowed us to better understand the issues our pupils face around sexting and also early exposure to sexualised content. We are in the process of developing a peer mentoring programme so that trained older pupils will be able to support younger pupils.*" Following on from this the Headteacher of Plymouth High School for Girls outlined the main impact being the development of knowledge and the inclusion of that within the PSHE curriculum "*Working with Andy has helped better understand the motivations for sexting and also the wider issues around access to inappropriate content. By working with a member of staff who delivers this aspect of our PSHE programme, Andy has provided professional development for her so that she is better able to address the issues in school. As a result of this we are looking at more effectively integrating these into the PSHE curriculum*"

The research has impacted upon national policy via Ofsted Inspector briefings. The UK Safer Internet Centre, an organisation co-funded by the European Commission and bringing together a partnership of three leading organisations, Childnet International, the South West Grid for Learning and the Internet Watch Foundation, has used the research in their recent work with OFSTED namely in the provision of briefings for school inspectors. In the briefing for Ofsted Inspectors (Inspecting e-safety 2013), the research from Phippen is referenced and of the five sample questions for school leadership, three come from Phippen's research.

As stated by the Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre "*the research Professor Phippen does with us provides a strong evidence base to inform our strategy, policy and practice around online safety nationally and increasingly internationally. For example the annual reports published describing UK and international school online safety practice discloses staff training is consistently the weakest aspect of a schools online safety provision directly informed ours (and others) focus for supporting schools. Further examples relate to our recent work with OFSTED – the new evaluation framework specifically refer to online safety and Andy's research was used to evidence issues in the associated briefing notes we provide for inspectors.*"

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Full statement from the Director of UK Safer Internet Centre, an organisation co-funded by the European Commission and bringing together a partnership of three leading organisations, Childnet International, the South West Grid for Learning and the Internet Watch Foundation.

Full statement from Head Teacher, Worle Community School, Somerset on the impact on the school and the introduction of a new peer mentoring programme.

Inspecting e-safety: briefing for Section 5 inspection, Ofsted January 2013. Phippen referenced and questions for leaders based on research.
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/briefings-and-information-for-use-during-inspections-of-maintained-schools-and-academies

A video and resources produced by the Child Online Protection and Exploitation Unit that used the research to develop the script and resources:
http://www.ceop.police.uk/safer_internet_day_2011/Resources/

UK Council for Child Internet Safety research highlight:
http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/about/news/11th-december-2012-new-sexting-research-by-uk-safer-internet-centre-plymouth-university-out-today

Research quoted in Parliament by Ann Coffey MP:
http://www.theyworkforyou.com/whall/?id=2012-04-25a.279.1&s=plymouth#g279.2

Independent Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Online Safety:
http://www.claireperry.org.uk/downloads/independent-parliamentary-inquiry-into-online-child-protection.pdf

Coverage on BBC Radio 1's Sexnight:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/surgery/sexnight/

Small selection of various press pieces:
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/9199126/Sexting-a-new-teen-cyber-bullying-epidemic.html

http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/mps-to-debate-the-growing-problem-of-young-girls-being-pressurised-into-sexting-7676015.html