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# **'Men are by Nature Dogs': Metaphors in a Newspaper's Cartoon on the Sexual Abuse of an Underage Girl and in the Readers' Facebook Comments<sup>1</sup>**

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CHIPO PHILI

University of Botswana

PhiliC@UB.AC.BW

## **Abstract**

*Feminist studies in Botswana have so far focused on various aspects of women's lives and lived experiences but there is scarcity of research on how they are represented in cartoons, specifically how they are conceptualised via misogynistic metaphors. Gender relations are relations of power and conceptual metaphors help us understand how women are talked and thought about and the roles they occupy in heterosexual sex. Drawing on feminist critical discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor theory, this study reports on the findings of one cartoon on the sexual abuse of an underage girl in The Voice newspaper's cartoon column and in the readers' Facebook comments on the cartoon. The results show that the readers not only use a lot more sex metaphors than can be found in the cartoon text but varied and dysphemistic ones as well, which dehumanise and objectify the targets. While food metaphors exclusively refer to the sexually abused girl, the male perpetrator and men in general, are metaphorised as 'dogs', while women in general, are 'bitches'. The results show that female readers' resistance to patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies inadvertently reproduces gender power imbalances and beliefs about women's sexual availability and men's sexual insatiability.*

**Key words:** metaphors, newspaper cartoon, readers' Facebook comments, sexual abuse, underage girl

## **1. Introduction**

Worldwide, satirical cartoons are a common feature in newspapers. In Botswana, there is a paucity of research on cartoons in general, although political cartoons have received some attention (Akpabio, 2008; 2021; Makgala & Chebanne, 2016; Rapoo, 2013; Tutwane, 2017). The impetus to carry out this study, therefore, derives from this gap in research and intends to shift analysis of cartoons from politics and male elites in broadsheets to representations of gender and sexuality, and sexual violence against girls in a

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<sup>1</sup> This study has an image of a sexualised cartoon and also quotes examples of language use that are explicitly sexist and misogynistic.

cartoon column in a tabloid newspaper. In other words, sexual abuse and girls are not included in political cartoon research of broadsheets. In Botswana, politics is a male-dominated sphere; for example, the national assembly comprises just 11% of female representation. A lack of female political representation has detrimental effects on the lives of women and girls, who are often victims of sexual violence (Ramabu, 2020; Samboma, 2020) but whose voices are silent when legislations about their sexuality are made in parliament. For example, Bogolo Kenewendo, a former Trade minister in Botswana, said on BBC Focus on Africa that, as a young woman, her appointment to cabinet was questioned and she was also sexually harassed on the job (Lucas, 2023). Seeing that even as a minister, she was not immune to sexual harassment, she said that it had motivated her to file a motion to amend Botswana's penal code to extend the age of sexual consent to 18 to protect vulnerable girls from sexual abuse. Phili (2022) found that cartoon representations and Facebook comments on professional women portrayed them as having used their sexual power rather than qualifications and experience to get managerial positions rather

It should be noted though that having many women in parliament may not necessarily translate to positive gender policy changes as female members of parliament in Botswana usually toe the party line even when that works against the interests of women and girls. Similarly, having women in executive positions in the media does not necessarily result in a major shift on how women are represented (Phili, 2022; Rooney, 2018). For instance, the Minister of Immigration, Nationality and Gender affairs, Annah Mokgethi, blocked a motion by a male opposition member of parliament who wanted the President to establish a commission of inquiry into violence against women in the country (Tsimane, 2022). While the minister denied ordinary women and girls a chance to be heard by the inquiry, she had police escorts and security personnel deployed at her house to protect her from an abusive husband (Mlilo, 2020), which is a glaring case of social class and political power privilege.

This paper draws on conceptual metaphor theory and feminist critical discourse analysis to explore representations of gender and heterosexuality via metaphors in Botswana's *The Voice* newspaper's cartoon column 'Conversations in a Combi' and in the readers' Facebook comments. Specifically, this study explores how sexual metaphors are deployed to talk about heterosexual acts and the roles assigned to those participating in the acts. The study starts from the assumption that metaphors, like all language use, do not represent the world neutrally as only certain aspects of the thing/person being metaphorically represented are highlighted while others are backgrounded. As such, metaphors for (hetero)sex can be carriers of ideology and represent the world from particular (usually dominant) viewpoints, which marginalise women and girls. It is for this reason that this study adopts feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as a theoretical framework.

Feminist critical discourse analysts (Lazar, 2002) believe that gender as a pervasive organising structure is the point of departure from which people of all ethnicities, religions and economic classes come to understand relations of difference and hierarchy. It functions as an interpretative category, entering into and partially constituting these other social relations and activities

(Lazar, 2005). As Eckert (1989) points out, 'traditional gender ideology pairs up men and women for life, whereas no cultural norm pairs up a white person and a black person or a working-class individual with a middle-class person for life' (p. 253-4). The centrality of gender as a social category is due to the fact that it is premised on biological differences or asymmetric meanings of 'male' and 'female', and the consequences of being assigned to one or the other within concrete social practices (Lazar, 2005, p.5). Feminist approaches to gender research acknowledge the pervasiveness of gender inequality as a social problem and endeavour to expose how gender is imbricated with hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy, power, and social injustice. Within a poststructuralist outlook, feminist approaches view discourse as social practice, and as constituted and constitutive of social life. Thus, through language use, as with other non-linguistic social practices, ideologies that (re)produce gender inequalities can be affirmed and perpetuated or resisted and destabilised.

This study has the following objectives:

- i. Identify metaphors used in *The Voice* cartoon column and in readers' Facebook posts to conceptualise (hetero)sexual abuse and or (hetero)sex, the victim of child sexual abuse, and the perpetrator.
- ii. Identify and explain the source domains of these metaphors in relation to the targets.
- iii. Explain the implications these metaphors might have for child sexual abuse and sexual violence against girls and women in Botswana.

In the next sections, I will first give a brief background on conceptual metaphor theory and review the literature on metaphors for sex. This is followed by the context of my study (Botswana), and then a section describing the data, and finally, data analysis and conclusions.

## **2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)**

Metaphors are not simply figures of speech but 'primarily a matter of thought and action' manifested in language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 153). Forceville (2002) notes that since Lakoff and Johnson's pioneering work, studies of conceptual metaphors have investigated how metaphors' verbal manifestations relate to their cognitive origins. Metaphors enable us to think, talk about and understand abstract or subjective concepts in terms of concrete ones, 'where the two things are different, but some similarities or correspondences can be perceived between them' (Semino, 2021, p. 50). Conceptual metaphor theorists posit that in representing one thing as another, we usually draw on tangible experiences (the source domain, e.g. journey) to talk about abstract notions (the target domain, e.g., life). Yet, there are metaphors where both the source and target domain are concrete such as in cases of human beings being conceptualised as animals.

### **3. Sex Metaphors**

In Botswana as in most African societies, the equivalent of the English terms 'vagina', 'penis', and 'testicles' are very offensive terms that attract corporeal punishment. As they are taboo, language users will find creative ways to talk about sex and sex organs because of the pervasiveness of sex in everyday life. Burrige (2004, p. 199) posits that that which is prohibited is viewed by social actors as 'dangerous, revolting but also thrilling and powerful'. To avoid explicit language, Fernández (2008, p. 96) points out that language users either 'resort to euphemism (i.e., the semantic process by which the taboo is stripped of its most explicit/obscene overtones) or dysphemism (i.e., whereby the most pejorative traits of the taboo are highlighted with an offensive aim to the addressee)'. Traditional Tswana culture believes that sexual intercourse occurs in bed, hence euphemisms for sex are derived from words such as 'morobalo' and 'thobalano', which both have the meaning 'sleep' or 'dikobo' (bedding/blankets). These words avoid offence by using taboo terms, yet metaphors can also be used pejoratively, e.g., 'kuku' (cake) is a common metaphor for the vagina in the Setswana language, which associates female sexuality with sugar and sweetness (Batibo & Kopi, 2008, 2016). This metaphor is dysphemistic because it also conveys meaning about the role of the vagina/woman in heterosexual sex, i.e., as an object and strips the female participants of agency in sex acts.

Research on metaphors for sex has found the 'sex is eating' metaphor to be prevalent across languages and cultures (Emanatian, 1996; Fernández, 2008; Hines, 1994; Hiraga, 1991; Maalej, 2001; Makoni, 2015). Khajeh and Abdullah (2012, p. 71) assume that the prevalence of this metaphor across cultures might be due to the prominence of food in everyday life as a specific source of nourishment and pleasure. Emanatian (1999) submits that sex and eating are the most salient ways in which the inside of the body permeates and is permeated by the outside world or another body. Koller (2022) asserts that metaphors can be carriers of ideology, for example, in the 'sex is eating' metaphor, the eater is positioned as a male who eats a female (the food), which reduces women to procurable sex objects to be enjoyed by men (Hines, 2000).

Makoni (2015, p. 42) asserts that 'naming is [...] about selecting a specific word or expression from an array of possibilities to represent a specific object in the real world'. Therefore, metaphors reflect choices about what can be said, who can say it, when, why, and where. Thus, a study of metaphors for heterosexual sex in a newspaper with a public Facebook page is significant because it gives insights into the source domains the metaphors are drawn from, the kind of metaphors used by each gender, the ideologies that shape such linguistic choices and the implications these might have for child sexual abuse and sexual violence against women in Botswana.

Other research has also found that metaphors such as the 'sex is riding' (Fernández, 2008; López Rodríguez, 2009) point to conceptualisations of women as animals that are mounted by men. The conceptual basis for this metaphor is an overall view of the inequality of the participants in heterosexual sex. Such power imbalance is being communicated by dehumanising the female partner so that they become an animal controlled by the male partner. Related to this, Koller's investigation of metaphors for

heterosexual relations used by involuntary celibates on Reddit found that animal metaphors are used to dehumanise both individual and collective social actors. However, she found that the derogative label ‘bitch’ was used six times to refer to women but only once for a man. What is more, when used to refer to women it was combined with another violent sexually framed word ‘fuck’ as in ‘fuck that bitch’ in contrast to when it refers to a man, e.g., ‘he is probably a paranoid little bitch’, where the denigration comes from being feminised and therefore socially downgraded. López Rodríguez (2009) found that both men and women can be conceptualised as hunters and prey. When men are seen as hunting animals, they are conceptualised as wild, beastly, possessing uncontrolled sexual instincts and as dangerous. However, López Rodríguez (2009) also shows that metaphors of women as hunters also carry connotations that they are menacingly dangerous in a way that disapproves of their sexual power. In Botswana, Phili (2022) found that at the interface of gender, sexuality and class, wild animal metaphors are applied to working-class men (herd boys and garden boys), who are mainly conceptualised as ‘nakedi’ [skunk], and ‘tshwene’ [baboon], an interesting finding about the generative nature of colonial ideologies in non-white spaces (cf., Kibicho, 2009; Hill Collins, 2005; Makoni, 2016).

#### ***4. Metaphor and Heteronormativity in Botswana***

In this section, I review the few studies available on metaphor, gender and sexuality in Botswana. To begin with, Ndana (2009) analyses the sexual connotations of the following Subiya nuptial song among the Vekuhane/Vekwahane in the Chobe District.

Mu **twalye** kamwalye [You take the bride]  
 Kwa mwihyavo [To the groom]  
 Aka **tuke** nyina ne si [So she insults her mother and father]

Ndana’s analysis shows that the word ‘twalye’ is used both literally and metaphorically to mean that the bride is physically taken to the groom’s place after marriage and also to represent the first sexual encounter as a journey into adulthood. As he puts it, ‘twalye’ is a sexual journey and an ‘initiation towards adulthood in which the entrants are exposed to the secrets of that institution [...] a journey towards self-discovery’ (p. 131). ‘Tuke’ [insult] is a euphemism for heterosexual intercourse, used to suggest the young bride is a virgin, who has never seen a grown man’s penis. Thus, her husband’s nudity is an enactment of her father’s, and the intercourse re-enacts how she was conceived by her parents. Therefore, it can be conceptualised as ‘sex is an insult/to have sex is to insult your parents’.

Batibo and Kopi (2008, 2016) examine the nature and origin of sex-related euphemisms in Setswana and note that the insurgence of HIV/Aids has made sex a subject of discussion in public spaces and thus, has given rise to more sex euphemisms. Batibo and Kopi’s (2008) study is descriptive and does not distinguish between the euphemistic and dysphemistic functions of these sex-related metaphors. However, one can identify some euphemistic metaphors, especially about male genitals, e.g. the penis as ‘paepe/paepelaene’ (pipe/pipeline), ‘mozanga’ [cigarette] and testicles as

‘dibole’ [balls] or ‘mae’ [eggs], which are based on visual similarity (see also Thetela, 2002). However, the metaphors for the vagina tend to bear no resemblance to it, e.g. ‘mmele’ [body], ‘kuku’ [cake] and ‘maeporopate’ [my property] (see also Makoni, 2015). The study also shows that there is gender differentiation in metaphors for men and women who are perceived as sexually insatiable, with men activated and functionalised as ‘moji’ [eater/consumer] or ‘mojimogolo’ [big consumer], while women are labelled ‘bomma-monatenate’ [madams-sweet-sweet, i.e. those who are too tasty]. The repetition of the stem ‘nate-nate’ conveys a negative attitude and suggests such a woman is promiscuous. Thus, sexual insatiability in a woman is not desirable as it counters patriarchal-heteronormative ideologies (see also Alimi & Arua, 2008).

## **5. The Voice Newspaper, the Cartoon Column and Readers’ Comments**

*The Voice* is a tabloid newspaper established in 1993 as the *Francistown Extra* by the Francistown (PTY) Ltd company. According to a Gender Links and the Media Audience survey (2007), *The Voice* is read mostly by people in urban (48%) and peri-urban areas (33.3%). It also found that 50% of the readership had tertiary education, and the readership was 53.8% male compared to 47.2% females, with the largest group of readers being between the ages of 20 and 35. Based on this survey, it can be postulated that *The Voice* newspaper caters for mainly urban, young working-class males (see Phili, 2022). The newspaper, which publishes every Friday, claims to sell 60,000 copies per edition, although Rooney (2018) opines that media houses often inflate their circulations to attract investors. However, Lesitaokana *et al.*’s (2014) survey of newspaper reading preferences among people in Botswana found that *The Voice* was read by 80% of the respondents. It also has the highest number of Facebook followers of all newspapers in Botswana, which stood at 901,593 as of January 2023.

Being a tabloid newspaper, *The Voice* publishes more human-interest stories believed to reflect the lived experiences of the working-class. Thus, it can be said to be a populist left-wing newspaper. Indeed, Phili (2022) found in her analysis of the column ‘Conversations in a Combi’ that the anti-elitist ideology complexly interweaved with hetero-patriarchal and xenophobic ideologies to position women, middle-class men and foreigners as outsiders. That is, while the newspaper is posturing as an advocate for the socially marginalised and economically disadvantaged, not all social groups are spoken for in its content, including women. This is despite the newspaper boasting more female representation than other media houses in Botswana; with two women having been in its executive management: one as owner and publisher, and another as editor in chief (Mbuya, 2018).

### **5.1 The ‘Conversations in a Combi’ Cartoon Column**

The earliest publication I found of the column ‘Conversations in a Combi’ is dated May 27, 2011, by Dubani-wa-Dubani. A survey of a few other publications by the same author reveals the column covered social protests,

football matches and political events but not gender and sexuality, as was the case when another writer took over in the period 2013-2018. The cartoon analysed falls under this period. The column features stories of people on a 'Combi', a name for a minibus, a citylink transport mode that carries up to 16 passengers. The public transport industry in Botswana is male dominated, with men being the majority owners of short and long-haul public transport as well as being drivers and conductors of taxis, combis and buses (see Makoni, 2011 about the transport industry in South Africa). It is not surprising that research in Sub-Saharan Africa has found that taxi and bus ranks are usually unsafe places for women and girls, who get stripped naked for wearing mini-skirts (Chakamba, 2017), sexually violated and verbally abused (Vincent, 2008). Worth noting is that in Botswana, taxi and combi driving and conducting are also marginalised occupations reserved for the uneducated, usually working-class men. With cheap, second-hand cars from abroad flooding car dealerships in Botswana, most regular Combi users are low-income earners and students whose parents cannot afford private transport or school buses. A one-way journey by Combi costs BWP7.00 (about 46 pence).

Considering the demographics of the newspaper's readers, especially that 50% of its readers have no tertiary education, the column features short stories that range between 244 and 584 words in very simple English. The narratives are in the form of a dialogue among the passengers, i.e. like a play. The participants are referred to by their gender, physical characteristics, and their professional identities, e.g. 'combi driver' or 'short-haired lady'. The cartoonist, who is also a passenger on the combi, does not take part in these conversations, which he later reproduces with a cartoon illustration for the newspaper. With the column's target audience being young and male, cartoon depictions tend to sexually objectify female characters more than males (see Figure 1 below). Female characters are depicted with voluminous bottoms that attract the male gaze. Since I do not investigate the production process of the cartoons, I can only speculate that these conversations are either real but embellished for satirical effect or wholly fictitious, or a combination of these two. The cartoon analysed is the work of a male cartoonist called Lesole Ntshole. Readers post comments reacting to the weekly cartoons on the newspaper's Facebook page.

## 5.2 The 'Conversations in a Combi' Cartoon Column

With 2.96 billion monthly active users by the third quarter of 2022, Facebook is the most popular social network (Chaudhry & Gruzd, 2019). Given the network's popularity, news media houses have consolidated their news on Facebook to reach and attract a wider audience (Trau & Ngo, 2018), especially younger readers, who get news on social media/online platforms and, are twice more likely to share and comment on news than older audiences (Vromen et al., 2016). The novelty of online news publishing has attracted significant research, some of which has focused on readers' comments (Chaudhry & Gruzd, 2019; Larson, 2017; Trau & Ngo, 2018; Vaughan et al., 2016; van Duyn et al., 2021).

Commenting, which is conceptualised as a form of interpersonal interaction (Hiemelboim & McCreery, 2012; Larsson, 2011) has become the norm in online news. Findings of research in the west, Asia and the middle east show

that online commenting is overwhelmingly a lateral communication, i.e. reader-reader interaction rather than between news producers and readers (Reich, 2011; Singer et al., 2011). Further, Lee and Tandoc Jr. (2017) report that a small fraction of comments are used in tailoring future articles. Larsson (2018) notes that while journalists equate the success of a story with the volume of comments below it, they are frustrated by the high share of uncivil, abusive comments directed at them and/or other readers as well as polarised low quality argumentation (Trau & Ngo, 2018). Thus, while online news publishing has democratised news and given voice to the marginalised, its asynchronous nature has also spurred those with discriminatory tendencies to express vitriol without accountability. Even though Facebook insists that users should register with their real names, commenters have sought to circumvent that by registering using names of famed deceased singers, politicians, controversial figures and even through misspelling their names or combining characters that do not make sense in Botswana languages (Phili, 2022). This could be attributed to comments not being moderated by news producers either because they are overwhelmed by the volume of comments or a deliberate act taken so as not to alienate readers and ultimately lose money and advertisers, i.e., some online papers intentionally may want to profit from hate speech.

An investigation of how metaphor is deployed in online commenting is an important undertaking in that it reveals how relationships are shaped by indexical relations of space and time and by cultural constraints of taboo. I surmise that given the ‘invisibility’ of the commenters due to the asynchronous dynamic of online commenting, metaphor might be viewed as a useful resource to talk about taboo topics like sex without feeling shame or causing offence and, it could mitigate the sensitivity of the child sexual abuse topic. Hence, euphemistic language, which is deemed socially acceptable because it is politer than the actual Setswana terms for sex and sexual organs, could be exploited by readers to resist or perpetuate harmful gender and sexuality ideologies.

The next section covers how the data was gathered, ethical considerations and is then followed by the analysis.

## **6. Methods**

### **6.1 The Data**

The data in this study was part of the 12 cartoons analysed for a broader research project (Phili, 2022). The project’s aim was to find out gender and sexuality ideologies that are articulated in the ‘Conversations in a Combi’ cartoon column’s publications between 2013 and 2017 and the readers’ reactions to the cartoons. The 12 cartoons that were analysed in the larger project were selected on the basis of gender and sexuality themes intersecting with other social categories such as age, social class, nationality, ethnicity and religion. Before I address the choice of the present cartoon, I will briefly provide the major findings in the aforementioned project so that the reader can appreciate the larger context of this study. It was found that the cartoon column espoused ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity which



intersected with xenophobia, classism and ageism. For example, to promote nationalistic ideologies, the cartoon column represented foreign evangelical male pastors as fake profiteers preying on vulnerable believers, as using their positions to sexually abuse younger women and conceptualised them through wild animal metaphors, e.g., as *predators preying* on women and as *being on the prowl*. The analysis exposed the column as anti-elite, with educated female professionals portrayed as incompetent lazy chatterers, while male professionals were represented as corrupt, sexual abusers of poor vulnerable girls and as illtreating working-class men. Another major finding was that generally, younger working-class men were represented in favourable terms including in cases of sexual abuse of minors, where one underage victim was appraised as a sexually experienced temptress. Cartoons that portrayed age-gap (heterosexual) relationships represented them as immoral, with particularly, younger women appraised negatively as gold-diggers.

The data for this paper comprises a dialogue, a cartoon illustration (Figure 1) published in 2016 and Facebook comments. The dialogue constitutes 308 words, while 99 comments (1796 words) were posted on Facebook in reaction to the multi-modal text. The choice of this particular cartoon for analysis is three-fold: firstly, of the two that tackled child sexual abuse in that original corpus of twelve cartoons, only this one was commented on)<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, within the cartoon dialogue, tensions between gender, sexuality (particularly, abuse of girls) and social class come to the fore, suggesting that sexual abuse is framed as a classist issue rather than a patriarchal one. For example, in the dialogue, one speaker insinuated that the girl's mother traded her to rich men with expensive cars in exchange for groceries but opened a case of defilement against a poor man who was enticed into sex by the victim's immodest dress because he could not buy groceries. I, therefore, thought it would be interesting to see if readers make reference to social class rather than gender as a factor in the sexual abuse of girls in their comments. Whereas, the initial project did not analyse metaphors, I noticed an overwhelming use of dehumanising gendered metaphors in readers' comments in reaction to this cartoon in particular. In contrast to other cartoons, the gender/sex of the commenter seemed to influence the type of metaphor being used in this cartoon; with female commenters drawing from the food domain and male commenters using animal metaphors more, which makes it an interesting pick for analysis (see section 7).

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<sup>2</sup> Another cartoon on the sexual abuse of a schoolgirl was not commented on. It was based on a real story of a male politician (then a serving councillor of the ruling party) whose relationship with a village schoolgirl resulted in pregnancy and exclusion from school. The story was widely covered in the media and resulted in protests by the civil society and opposition parties, but the perpetrator was never dropped from his political role nor prosecuted. I surmise the commenters may have thought it safe to not comment.



**Figure 1.** The 'Bringing sexy back' cartoon (*The Voice* Newspaper, 2016), reproduced with permission

## 6.2 Gathering Facebook Comments on the Cartoon in Figure 1

To identify the metaphors used by readers commenting on this cartoon, context played a central role. Therefore, I focused on verbal comments and a combination of verbal with visuals if they were used to complement each other in the same comment. Visuals used on their own were not analysed, of which there was only one such comment. The data were gathered by making screenshots in line with Facebook terms and conditions about data collection and use<sup>3</sup>. The commenters' personal information has been redacted. *The Voice* newspaper has a Facebook page that the public can follow and like, as well as share any content with others. To access the newspaper's Facebook page, one just has to have a Facebook account. Thus, according to Elm (2009), the data I am analysing falls under public information dealing with social rather than individual issues. Nevertheless, I wish to keep the commenters anonymous in my analysis and avoid quoting them extensively. I have therefore, not included the screenshots but reproduce verbatim only the part(s) of the comment(s) relevant to the paper, i.e. those parts containing metaphors.

Metaphors were identified by first reading all the comments to get a feel of the atmosphere of the discussions. Following Trau and Ngo (2018), I focused more on those comments that had many replies as they tend to generate more comments. Unlike isolated contributions, comments that are directly responded to by other readers are interactive and could shed light on culturally shared metaphors and also show those that are contested. For example, out of the 7 threads identified, one thread (an initial post plus 13 responses) generated 18 (51%) metaphors out of the 35 gathered in the comments data only. The thread, which is the longest shows polarisation of views on child sexual abuse between female and male commenters and features the 'dog' and 'bitch' metaphors more than other threads. My data showed that commenters posted isolated comments more than react to other readers' posts, perhaps as a conflict avoidance strategy. For example, the 7

<sup>3</sup> Meta Privacy Policy: <https://m.facebook.com/policy.php>

comments referred to above attracted 35 replies. This means that 64 posts were just reactions to the content rather than to other commenters. I gathered 17 (48%) metaphors in non-interactive comments, which shows that even isolated comments could be rich sources of metaphor data. Guided by the co-texts, I have indicated whether the metaphors are used euphemistically (i.e., to avoid using a swear word) or dysphemistically (i.e., used pejoratively to degrade the target) (Fernández, 2008).

## 7. The Findings

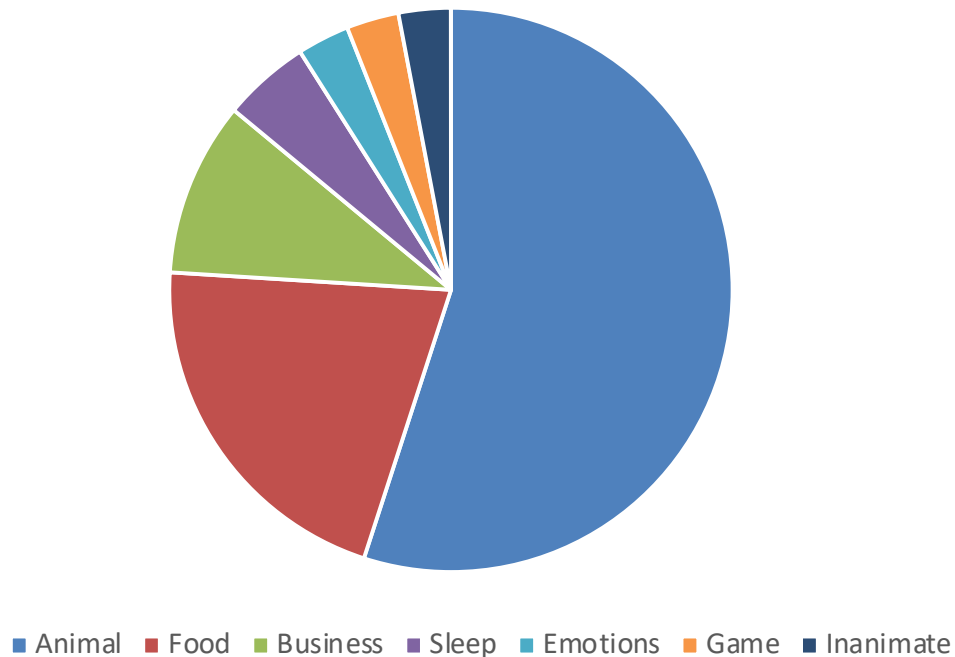
Metaphors in the Cartoon column	Type	Source domain	Target domain
Ripe [1]	Dysphemistic	Food production and development	Girl [victim of sexual abuse]
Bedded [1]	Euphemistic	Sleep	'Consensual' sexual intercourse
Traded [1]	Dysphemistic	Business	Girl/victim slept with older wealthy men for gifts/groceries/money
<b>Total = 3</b>			
<b>Metaphors in Facebook comments</b>		<b>Food</b>	
'Lekgela' (unripe/raw fruit) [1]	Euphemistic	Food production & development	Girl [victim of sexual abuse]
'Makgela' (unripe/raw fruits) [1]	Euphemistic		Girl [victim of sexual abuse]
'Kgetha' (harvest) [1]	Euphemistic		Sexual intercourse
'Jele'/'jewa' (eaten) [2]	Euphemistic	Food consumption	Sexual intercourse
'Hula' (feed/eat), by an animal [1]	Dysphemistic		Sexual intercourse
'Dipolo' (sausages) [1]	Euphemistic		Penises
'Mabelete' (bitches) [8] 'Lebelete' (bitch) [1]	Dysphemistic	<b>Animal (pet)</b>	Victim plus women and girls in general. Also, an implicit insult directed at female commenters in the thread
Dogs [7]	Dysphemistic	Pet	Perpetrator plus men in general
'Dipeke' (uncastrated male dogs or donkeys) [1]	Dysphemistic	Pet and farm animal	Perpetrator plus all men who abuse girls
'Mmapatsa phokwana' [1] (Like an uncastrated male goat whose	Dysphemistic	Farm animal	Victim of sexual abuse

testicles hang out for all to see, so is a girl/woman in a mini-skirt or shorts)			
'Pudi' (Goat) [2]	Dysphemistic	Farm animal	Perpetrator
Pervert 'e lo iruileng eo' (the pervert you bred/reared) [1]	Dysphemistic	Farm animal	Perpetrator
'Itshamekela Mantwane' (playing a game called small houses/homes/families) [1]	Euphemistic	The literal meaning: a game where children play being fathers and mothers. Figuratively in this context: sexual intercourse involving children; used to suggest both the victim and perpetrator are immature	'consensual' sexual intercourse
'Tinega' (anger coupled with aggression/hostility) [1]	Euphemistic	<b>Emotions</b>	Sexual arousal/male lust
'Robala' (sleep) [1]	Euphemistic	<b>Sleep</b>	'Consensual' sexual intercourse
'Dilo tse' (these things) [1]	Dysphemistic	<b>Object/inanimate</b>	Victim and women in short skirts as sex objects. Also, an implicit insult directed at female commenters in the thread
'Ithekisa' (sell/trade oneself) [3]	Dysphemistic	<b>Business</b>	Sleeping/sex with many men- directed at the young female victim and women in short skirts. Also, an implicit insult directed at female commenters in the thread
<b>Total = 35</b>			
<b>Overall total = 38</b>			

**Table 1.** Metaphor categories and types found in the cartoon text (Figure 1 and the dialogue) and in the readers' Facebook comments

Table 1 above shows that sex metaphors come mainly from the food and animal metaphor domains. With the former occurring 8 times (21%) in the whole data set, while the latter has a frequency of 21 (55%). The business source domain is also drawn on 4 times (10%) to conceptualise female behaviours, which are deemed unconventional such as wearing a short skirt. The trade metaphor suggests that a woman in a mini-skirt is marketing herself to men, i.e. she is asking for sex. There are only 2 (5%) occurrences of the sleep metaphor and one each from the source domains of game/play (3%), emotions (3%) and inanimate/objects (3%).

As the table above demonstrates, the cartoon text uses the least metaphors, accounting for only 8% while the comments data contributes 92%. This could be because being a public newspaper, the producers exercise more restraint than Facebook commenters in the use of dysphemistic sexist metaphors, especially. It is interesting that some of the source domains of the metaphors in the cartoon text are also found in the comments data, which suggests that the readers may have taken a cue from the text or it could be evidence of their wider use in society. The pie-chart below gives a summary of the data.



**Figure 2.** Metaphors per source domain (%)

With the exception of the metaphor ‘dipolo’, which literally means ‘sausages’ but has a euphemistic reference to penises, the findings reveal that food metaphors refer almost exclusively to the sexually abused girl and the sexual encounter, where the girl is positioned as a goal of the perpetrator’s actions through the verbs ‘kgetha’ [harvest] and ‘jele’ [eaten] in examples (1) and (2) respectively.

(1) *Banna ba bangwe ba rata go kgetha makgela*  
Some men like to harvest unripe fruits.

(2) *Mosimane o jele lekgela.*

This boy has eaten an unripe fruit.

Of interest is that except for 'ripe', which is found in the cartoon dialogue, food metaphors that reference the victim were found only in posts by female commenters. By contrast, the ubiquitous animal metaphor is used mostly by male commenters, especially the pejorative 'bitch/es' and the Setswana equivalent 'le-/mabelete'. From a critical feminist point of view, food metaphors are dysphemistic in that they objectify the young female victim and imply that once ripe, girls, like all women, will be available to men. For example, the cartoon text uses the 'ripe' metaphor to suggest that by wearing a mini-skirt, the girl is signalling to men that she is available. Thus, the metaphor of a ripe fruit conceptualises a sexually desirable and available woman. This can be noted in (3).

- (3) *Banna ba bangwe ba rata go kgetha makgela. Ba bo ba re le ne le nkitsha pelo.*  
Some men are fond of harvesting unripe fruits and then claim the fruit was enticing.

However, the co-text shows that the commenters' intentions are not to degrade but to emphasise that the victim is immature and incapable of engaging in consensual sex. For instance, the co-text of the comments quoted above also proposes that men who sexually abuse underage girls should go to jail as shown in example (4).

- (4) *Mosimane o jele lekgela jaanon yaa ko go tshwanetseng.*  
This boy has eaten an unripe fruit and he must get the punishment he deserves, (i.e., must go to jail).

According to Batibo and Kopi (2016), 'lekgela' is a girl who is a virgin. The animal metaphors, which fall into the sub-types of pets and farm animals, refer to the sexually abused girl and perpetrator but also to women and men in general. Specifically, the 'bitch/mabelete' metaphor, which connotes a sexually promiscuous female, has the highest frequency of 9, higher than the neutral term 'dog' and the gendered term 'di-pheke' [uncastrated male dogs/donkeys] with frequencies of 7 and 1, respectively. This is in line with Emanatian's (1996, p. 209) assertion that although men can be metaphorised as dogs and evaluated as promiscuous, dirty and worthless, 'the principal source domain image is of a bitch in heat, surrounded by several male dogs fighting to get at her'.

In some cultures, dogs are cherished pets and believed to be 'man's best friend' but in traditional African culture, dogs do not have economic value like farm animals, which are sources of food, money, labour (draught power) and used as a form of 'lobola' (bride price). Hence, the dog metaphor is apt in the context of sexual immorality as it represents the target as a worthless animal with no control over their sexual feelings, e.g. this comment says that, men are by nature 'dogs' ('ekar ba') [who] 'rape their children' suggesting that the perpetrator in the story, and men in general, are like dogs that mate even with their offspring. Despite the dehumanising effect of the 'dog' metaphor, it is important to comment further on the use of 'by nature' in this comment, which seems to suggest that sexual immorality is part of men's make-up. In other words, they have no intellectual capacity to distinguish between family

and strangers hence they rape even their own children. Thus, I argue that when used in the company of phrases like ‘by nature’, the dog metaphor may perpetuate sexual violence against women and girls as it puts responsibility for male sexual violence with them.

Relatedly, the goat metaphor in example (5) represents the perpetrator as a caged goat held in captivity by the victim and without freedom and thus, feeds on the vegetation around it.

(5) *#pudi e hula fa e #huneletsweng teng. O huneletse maikutlo a yo mongwe mo go ena.*

#a goat feeds/grazes where it is #caged. You have captured his feelings/you are holding him captive.

This suggests that by dressing in a mini skirt and crop top, the victim gains control of the perpetrator’s feelings, i.e. provokes his lust, which he has no control of. Thus, the victim is positioned as the one in control and therefore, responsible for the sexual abuse. This is also reported by Beneke (1982, p.20-21), where one male interviewee conceptualised sexuality/lust as a natural force provoked by a woman’s physical appearance. In his view, a woman who gets raped is responsible for both her appearance and the perpetrator’s reaction because ‘to be fully human, a man can only respond to such a force accordingly [...] to expect a man to inhibit his physical force is injurious to him’. This expression by Beneke’s interviewee is more than four decades old and such sexist beliefs may have no place in the UK now. My findings (Phili, 2022) show that in 2016, these beliefs were still prevalent in Botswana, suggesting the country may be decades behind the west in realising gender equality, especially when such sentiments are also expressed by female commenters.

The ‘bitch’ metaphor is used exclusively by male commenters to suggest girls and women dress in short skirts to entice men into sex for money. For example, a comment such as (6) can be linked to another in the same thread which uses the ‘trade’ metaphor (7).

(6) *Mabelete emisang go apara short skirt n dress your lil’ bitches the same in public.*

Bitches stop wearing short skirt n dress your lil’ bitches the same in public.

(7) *Ba a ithekisa mabelete a.*

They are trading/selling themselves off these bitches.

Women are represented as grammatically active, e.g. they are sellers, but also the commodity, e.g. selling themselves off. The bitch metaphor is gendered and culturally entrenched so much so that it is used to bully female commenters into silence, while male commenters create solidarity around the hashtag ‘#mabelete’ [#bitches]. Notably, the metaphor ‘bitches’ is also used along with a violent sexual verb ‘fuck’ as in Koller (2022), showing a strong

desire to harm the female whose behaviour is deemed non-normative. For instance, women are represented as not only prostituting themselves but also as bitches fucked by anything that passes.

The neutral term 'dogs' to represent male abusers shows male sexual depravity, but it is not problematised to the extent women's sexuality is and so is the use of 'pudi' [goat] to refer to the perpetrator. Interestingly, it is female commenters who use the 'dog' metaphor rather than the explicit insulting *mabelete* [bitch] label to criticise male sexual depravity, displaying what Thetela (2002) calls 'hlonipha' - the language of avoidance of swear words associated with girls and women in Southern Africa. This is in contrast to some male commenters' use of words such as 'fucked' and the very repugnant term 'nyokiwa'. 'Nyo' is a swear word for vagina, which when used shows utter disrespect to the target. As Batibo and Kopi (2008) note, connotations of violence of the word is usually toned down by the derivative '-ana', which means tiny/small or delicate little thing. The derivative produces the word 'nyo-ana', pronounced as 'nywaana' i.e., small/tiny or delicate or fragile vagina. The suffix '-iwa' in 'nyokiwa' positions the vagina as a goal of the male actor's sexual aggression, such as in (8).

(8) *A kere mabelete a simolola go nyokiwa a le 13 years.*

Well, bitches get fucked at 13 years.

Male commenters contest the 'dog' metaphor by repeatedly using the 'mabelete' [bitch] label and mocking women. Even some female commenters question the appropriateness of the 'dog' metaphor. For example, a female commenter who states that '*men are dogs*' is mocked in posts such as *which breed z yo dad?* and *Le di breed dife* [Which breed are you? i.e. your family]. There is only one comment that uses a male-gendered metaphor '*dipheke*' [uncastrated male dogs/donkeys], which is as explicit and perhaps as insulting as the word *mabelete* [bitches], as in (9).

(9) *Dipheke ke lona itshwareng...santse le ta tsena zanti...ha le palelwa le bue re le thuse ka badizo.*

You uncastrated dogs/donkeys...you are still going to fill prisons...if you cannot control your lust then a *burdizzo* will come in handy.

The co-text of the comment shows a negative evaluation of male sexual abusers rather than a positive one, although another meaning of male sexual virility can be read into the text because a 'pheke' [uncastrated dog/donkey] like a 'phoko' [an uncastrated male goat] and 'poo' [bull] are valued for their sexual drive and fertility by farmers. Thus, virile men are sometimes lauded as 'phoko', 'pheke' or 'poo'. However, for breeding purposes, farmers castrate all but one. Therefore, the commenter links this animal metaphor to a castration device 'burdizzo', suggesting that male sexual abusers should be castrated like animals. It is interesting that there is reference to male uncastrated animals to



disparage both men and women whose sexual behaviours are deemed non-normative. For example, a woman whose dress is deemed inappropriate is an uncastrated young goat ‘phokwana’ waving its testicles about for all to see, while men who sexually desire young girls are called uncastrated dogs and donkeys, perhaps making a link between masculinity and sexual virility. Thus, a woman who displays her body is taking on a masculine trait, hence the condemnation. However, we do not get to see the feminine term ‘bitch’ applied to men in this data contrary to Koller (2022) and in Alimi and Arua (2008).

Last but not least, I deal with how sexual abuse is conceptualised as a game and euphemised as ‘sleeping’ in order to water down the crime. Actually, the metaphors seem to suggest that it was consensual sex, especially in a Facebook comment that conceptualises sexual abuse as playing ‘mantwane’ (playing games). This positions the perpetrator and victim as a team of equals, i.e., children, who engaged in ‘innocent’ consensual sex.

In the cartoon dialogue, the perpetrator is grammatically active and semantically agentive as well, while the abused girl is passivated in ‘my younger brother bedded her’. I use agency as a semantic category that refers to the meaning expressed through language use (Darics & Koller, 2019). Social actor agency is viewed as gradable, i.e. as ranging from highly agentive to minimal agency, while activation is in binary opposition to passivation. For example, ‘bedded’ is a material process showing the social actor as having the highest agency, while ‘tinega’ [feeling angry] is a non-observable mental process and therefore, of a moderate agency. The metaphor ‘bedded’ connotes consensual sex in that in the Setswana language, forced sex is expressed as ‘go tsaya dikobo ka dikgoka’ [to take blankets/bedding forcefully], which distinguishes it from consensual sex, which is expressed as ‘go robalana/go kopanela dikobo’ [to sleep together/to share a bed/bedding] and defilement, ‘go robala le bana ba ba ko tlase ga dingwaga’ [to sleep with underage children]. In rape or forced sex, the perpetrator is activated and highly agentive as he ‘takes blankets by force’ but in defilement, the underage child is positioned as an associate through the circumstance ‘sleep with children’, suggesting a collective responsibility since violence was not used to get the minor to sleep with the perpetrator.

Finally, an interesting finding is a metaphor of emotion, e.g., ‘tinega’ [anger] to conceptualise male lust as a raging emotion. This metaphor is laced with conceptions of lust as aggressive and out of control (Erhlich, 1998; Lakoff, 1987). For example, the commenter’s basis for this metaphor is that the emotion and the consequent violation of the girl were reactions to an immodestly dressed girl such as in (10).

- (10) *O tinega ka bonako he was provoked.*  
He gets angry really easily/he is short tempered, he was provoked.

This suggests that the perpetrator got sexually aroused because the victim enticed him with her dress. This metaphor implies that it is normal for men to lose control of their sexual instincts at seeing women and even young girls' bodies, which justifies sexual violence against them by blaming their appearance for men's sexual crimes (Beneke, 1982).

## ***8. Discussion and Conclusions***

This study set out to identify sexual metaphors for sex used in a cartoon about the sexual abuse of an underage girl in *The Voice* newspaper and in readers' Facebook comments. It was found that sex metaphors are drawn mainly from the food and animal domains. 68% of the metaphors identified are dysphemistic, showing that they are deployed to offend the addressee. The findings also show that the victim of sexual abuse and women, in general, are metaphorised as traders, bitches and food, whereas the perpetrator and all men are represented mainly as animals. While male commenters are drawn to violent metaphors that position girls and women as goals of men's sexual acts, female commenters use euphemisms and inadvertently reproduce patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies. For example, the 'dog' and 'dipheke' [uncastrated dogs] metaphors are used to express extreme disgust at male perpetrators of sexual abuse but also draw on ideological beliefs about men's sexual insatiability and virility. This could excuse sexual abuse on the premise that girls entice perpetrators with immodest dress. It can be argued that some male commenters deploy the 'bitch' metaphor not only to control the interactional space, (i.e. a public newspaper's Facebook page) and dominate female commenters but to have the material effect to constrain and control female sexuality and women's public identities. Thus, not only the victim is a 'lebelele' [bitch] but all women and girls who wear short skirts in public are traders, marketing themselves off to men.

Research on sexuality in Botswana is still in its infancy as shown by the few articles reviewed in section 4. More research on social media platforms is needed as they have become the space for the expression of sexist and misogynistic views. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Botswana participated for the first time in the observance of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, which is part of the global initiatives led by the United Nations to eradicate hate speech in all its forms. Findings from research can be used to motivate for policies on hate speech in the country as currently there is no legislation on online hate speech. Additionally, the media fraternity as a relevant actor would be bound by the legislations passed in parliament to take appropriate measures to address the phenomenon of hate speech including in their content.

As images can rely on discriminatory and exclusionary rhetoric and stereotypes for persuasive purposes, future research on representations of

gender and sexuality in cartoons could interweave metaphor analysis with multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2016). For example, in a conflation of romance with lust, the heart icons in Figure 1 are recurring motifs in the cartoon column and so is the hanging tongue, both of which are associated with male caricatures' reactions to younger women and girls' bodies (see Phili, 2022). These motifs could be interpreted as metaphors; the heart representing love, and lust signalled by a hanging tongue. In the same vein, the discourse historical approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2013) and argumentation theories (Chilton, 2004) can be used in conjunction with metaphor analysis. The analysis shows that the commenters condemn sexual depravity by men, but not to the same extent they do for perceived female sexual immorality, e.g. wearing a miniskirt. While men are metaphorised as 'dogs by nature', women and girls are disparaged as 'bitches' who actively seek men's attention via their dress.

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