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Recent Research Abstracts

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INTERNET AND RELATIONSHIPS

Parker, T.S. & Wmpler, K.S. (2003) How bad is it? Perceptions of the relationship impact of different types of Internet sexual activities. *Contemporary Family Therapy – An International Journal*, 25 (4), 415-429

Internet sex has become a ubiquitous phenomenon that is affecting couples and families. Eight scenarios (from visiting various adult web sites to having sex) involving a male or female character in a committed relationship were presented in a survey format. Participants (n = 242) rated each scenario in terms of emotional and physical involvement, amount of distraction from the primary relationship, and whether the respondent considered the scenario to be an affair. Results indicate that perceptions of internet activities differed depending on the type of internet sexual activity, although the majority of the internet sexual activities were considered to be highly emotional involving, a distraction to the relationship, and sexual in nature, though no physical contact was involved. The gender of the character in the scenario had no effect on participants' responses. Women tended to see the scenarios as being more serious than men. Clinical implications are discussed.

Whitty, T.M. (2003) Cyber-flirting: Playing at love on the Internet. *Theory and Psychology*, 13 (3), 339-357.

While there exists some research on offline flirting, there is currently little in the way of conceptual theory or empirical research on flirting in cyberspace. This paper attempts to help redress this balance. The paper initially presents a summary of the behaviour of offline flirting and particularly identifies what constitutes offline flirting signals. Given this background context, suggestions are made as to how we might better conceptualize online flirting. The prevailing wisdom has been that we should focus on the absence of the body in cyberspace. This view is challenged here. Instead, it is argued that researchers should re-orient their focus to how the body is reconstructed online. Winnicott's notions of 'potential space' and 'transitional objects' are drawn upon in this paper to advance an argument that online flirting should be considered as a form of play. In making this argument, it is contended that online flirting has unique aspects in comparison to offline flirting. In particular, while realistic elements are present in online flirting, there is a blurring between what is reality and fantasy when one engages in flirtatious behaviour on the Internet

Séguin-Levesque, Chantal; Laliberté, Marie Lyne N.; Pelletier, Luc G.; Blanchard, Céline; Vallerand, Robert J. (2003) Harmonious and obsessive passion for the Internet: their associations with the couple's relationship. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 33(1): pp. 197-221

Based on a motivational perspective of passion, we investigated the associations between passion for the Internet and level of self-determined motivation toward the couple's relationship. Our result show that an obsessive passion toward the Internet was associated with lower self-determination in the couple, greater conflict in the relationship, and low level of dyadic adjustment. In contrast, harmonious passion toward the Internet was associated with greater self-determination in the couple, less conflict, and greater dyadic adjustment. Results suggest that use of the Internet is not necessarily associated with negative interpersonal outcomes. Rather, it appears that the way the activity has been internalized is associated with how individuals internalize their reasons for behaving in other domains.