4-17-2013

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INTRODUCTION

Online Communication
- Everyday, millions of people interact with others online through computer-mediated communication (CMC) on social networking websites, such as Facebook.
- CMC has been linked to a phenomenon known as the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE), in which people say things and do behaviors online that they would not say or do offline (Suler, 2004).
- One way that people may say or do things while online that they would not normally is through their flirting behaviors while online.

Online Flirting vs. Offline Flirting
- ODE may lead to people being more likely to exhibit disinhibited online behaviors, such as flirting with someone besides your romantic partner.
- Flirting with others outside of a dyadic romantic relationship has a negative impact on the romantic relationship (Kalbfleisch, 1993).
- There is a general view in our society that online flirting is less detrimental to a relationship than face-to-face flirting (Malt, 2007) and that flirting that occurs in private is more detrimental to a relationship than public flirting (Pittman, 1990).
- There is a lack of understanding if these same views about offline flirting are upheld in online flirting situations and this study seeks to address this need.

GOALS OF OUR RESEARCH

Goal 1: Due to the lack of research in this area, a goal of this study is to provide a basis of information on the amount of online flirting, how online flirting occurs, and the impact of online flirting among college-age students.

Goal 2: The current study will also be examining participants' perception of how detrimental the impact of online flirting would be on their romantic relationship compared to offline flirting.

Goal 3: This study will be assessing the impact of public versus private online flirting on a romantic relationship.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Participants are expected to be approximately 250 undergraduates who will be asked to complete the following:

- Read 4 vignettes which describe a public or private flirting behavior that occurs either offline or online and rate the level of detriment to the relationship they believe the various flirting behaviors would have on a romantic relationship.

- An Internet Usage Questionnaire pertaining to their use of online communication in order to provide an understanding of online flirting among college students.

- A demographics questionnaire which will gather information such as, age, gender, relationship status and length.

VIGNETTES

Offline public flirting situation:
"Imagine you and your romantic partner are at a party talking with a group of friends. Your significant other begins flirting with another person in the group by saying 'You look really nice today'".

Offline private flirting situation:
"Imagine your romantic partner is at a party. He/she begins flirting with another person by smiling and saying, 'You looked really nice today' while both are standing alone with each other".

Online public flirting situation:
"Imagine you are on Facebook. You see your significant other flirting with another person through a Facebook wall post that says, 'You looked really nice today' ".

Online private flirting situation:
"Imagine your significant other flirting with another person through a private Facebook message that's says, 'You looked really nice today'".

HYPOTHESES

1. We are predicting that online flirting will be perceived as less detrimental to a romantic relationship than offline flirting as a result of an informal understanding of disinhibited online behavior.

2. We are predicting that public online flirting will lead to a lower perception of detriment on a romantic relationship that private online flirting.

3. We are also predicting that the results from the internet usage questionnaire will show online flirting is actively occurring on this college campus and is having an impact on the relationships of students.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The current study will address the lack of research in the area of online behaviors and flirting.

- The results of this study will provide a better understanding of the effects of online flirting and how it differs in its impact on romantic relationships compared to offline flirting.

- Further research is needed in this area to add to the foundation of knowledge needed to understand the role and impact of the internet in lives and relationships.

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