

Sharing experiences of infidelity through Computer Mediated Communication: The case of online support groups.

Summary of PhD Thesis (in progress), Evdokia Dali

The ubiquitous presence of Internet has transformed various aspects of interpersonal relationships, contributing to the creation of new forms of social interaction and new means of public presence. The domination of social media in daily life has changed aspects of close interpersonal relationships, including relational transgressions, such as infidelity; it has affected how people redefine the subjective connotations of living such experiences and how they cope with them. This is reflected in the appeal of online spaces, such as support groups, where members narrate about experiences of intimate relationships. Based on the notion of “media multiplexity” of contemporary relationships, the aim of this dissertation is to examine (a) the experiences described by individuals who have been engaged in extradyadic relationships, being in the position of “betrayed partner”, “cheater” and “third person” and narrate about them in online support groups and (b) the components of the “matrix of interaction”, which facilitate the environment of “support” in these groups. The study examines –through thematic analysis- the content of 150 posts and their responses, published during 5 months in a popular online support group about romantic relationships. The results reflect the social character of new technologies, which “feed” our sense of self. The humans’ need of belonging and being contained in times of relational hardship is looking for sources of gratification and the Internet comes to partially satisfy this need. The results highlight that the meaning making processes and the attempt to re-negotiate unpleasant situations are relational processes that are often refined and fortified through online channels. This study offers implications about how mediated identities are constructed and how group processes of support develop in online spaces.