Media society

Business

The popularization of the Internet has evoked the concerns of many psychologists.

Researchers have examined, for instance, the degree to which the new media is addictive (Young, 1998) or promotes personal isolation (Kraut et al., 1998). One of the more consistent concerns is the presence of pornography and erotica and the expression of sexuality on the Internet. An on-line survey of Internet users (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999) suggests that sexual pursuits, ranging from visiting web sites with sexual themes to intense on-line sexual interactions, may be the most common use of the Internet. The government and the media have also become alarmed. A recent article in Newsweek (Norland & Bartholet, 2006) has declared that the Internet is directly responsible for an increase in child pornography and other forms of child sexual abuse.

Are such concerns new, or are they part of a recurring pattern in which people worry about the use of a new technology for sexual purposes? Perhaps researchers can better understand contemporary concerns regarding sexuality on the Internet if they understand past concerns that have surfaced regarding other mass media. Sociolists have suggested earlier that problems associated with the Internet, such as Internet addiction, can be better understood in the context of the evolution of technology in general than by specifically singling out the Internet as a dangerous agent. The present paper focuses on how sexuality on the Internet is part of a larger historical picture regarding the evolution of technology, particularly media technology, during the last century. People have expressed concern regarding sexuality as transmitted through newer tools such as movie

projectors, televisions, and telephones. In this part of the paper, we suggest that current issues regarding sexuality on the Internet are part of a larger pattern by which new technologies emerge and develop.

We discuss the relationship between technology and sexuality in the context of the three following (not mutually exclusive) theoretical viewpoints: (a) technology and efficacy; (b) technology, alienation, and depersonalization; and (c) technology and power. Technology's proponents point out that new technologies lead to speedier, more accurate, and improved outcomes that increase our capabilities and make us more efficacious (3). If we consider what we are able to do with a simple desktop computer that we could not consider doing 2 decades ago, we'd be astonished at the huge list of tasks. In terms of the Internet, we are able to communicate far more effectively, with more people and in more ways, than before (7). The advancement in the production and availability of sexual material can be viewed as a function of technological advancement (5).

The development of sexual media over the last 100 years has been directly related to the technological leaps we have witnessed in this relatively short time. It is arguable that all media technologies, from print to the Internet, have been used for sexual purposes. We'd be hard pressed to come up with a list of technologies that have not been used by some people for sexual purposes. …