Virtual intimacy research paper sample

Technology, Internet

Intimacy, whether virtual or physical, refers to the feeling of ' belonging together' with a relationship partner or spouse. An intimate relationship is an affiliation where partners feel connected either physically or emotionally. Physical intimacy, in most cases, entails romantic affairs accompanied by sexual activity. Emotional intimacy refers to a sense of sentimental attachment to someone (Hodson, Kristin, Alisha Worthington, and Thomas 5). The act of intimacy has in the recent past, been common in people living in different regions. This is referred to as virtual intimacy: studies reveal that it is possible for an individual to develop a romantic affinity for another, through computer-aided interactions (Scott, Veronica, Karen, Mottarella, and Maria 760). Technology advancements have made it possible for people to interact from all parts of the world. Social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype have eased the networking process between individuals resulting into cases of virtual intimacy. This has triggered numerous questions such as why individuals prefer being virtually intimate as opposed to physical intimacy, whether a virtual relationship satisfies an individual's needs, where the virtual relationships start, and whether virtual intimacy is becoming naturalized.

Why individuals prefer, being virtually intimate to being physically intimate?

One major reason why individuals prefer virtual intimacy to physical intimacy is the ease of access and availability associated with virtual intimacy. Skype, for example, an internet telephony service, allows users to make free calls through the internet. Individuals in virtual relationships prefer this service because they easily communicate with their partners especially if they reside

in different geographical regions (Hulsey 23). E-mail service is also another method through which people in virtual relationships send messages to their counterparts at low costs. The recipients receive the messages instantly, thus, enhancing communication.

The level of anonymity correlated to virtual intimacy makes it more attractive to individuals than they are to physical intimacy. Anonymity is the state of being unknown. Social sites have become the new frontier of relationships, thus to maintain an image or first impression, most individuals create profiles of inexistence people. These profiles make them appealing to their partners, hence; maintaining their level of intimacy (Hulsey 23).

People prefer virtual intimacy to physical intimacy because of the level of privacy virtual intimacy provides (Hogan 19). Most individuals value their personal space especially in intimate relationships, and feel discomfort when encroached (Robins 34). Virtual intimacy provides an opportunity for a person to dominate themselves without interferences from their partner; for example, one may reply a partner's messages whenever they wish and at their own pace. Individuals involved in physical affairs may not enjoy as much solitude as their counterparts in virtual relationships because people tend to have numerous physical demands.

The risk of disease contraction is minimal with virtual intimacy, compared to physical intimacy. Common diseases contracted by people in romantic affairs include sexually transmitted infections and diseases, and a terminal condition like AIDS. People involved in virtual intimacy bear no risks of acquiring such ailments because their encounters with each other are purely computer-mediated.

The issue of costs incurred in maintaining a relationship is vital in determining the sustainability of the association. Virtual intimacy relationships involve minimal expenses; internet connection charges are the only charges associated with virtual relationships and intimacy. Other expenses may include telephone charges that are no longer common given the progress in technology. Physical intimacy, on the other hand, may require a person to travel to connect with their partner, hence costs. Openness among individuals in a virtual-intimate relationship makes them preferable to physical relationships. An individual can through the internet, easily express thoughts, feelings, and opinions, which they would not in reality (Hogan 23). The internet provides a ground for sincerity regarding a variety of issues; it makes it easy for people who are shy in real life to relate with their online partners.

Does having a virtual relationship satisfy an individual's needs for the most part compared to reality?

A virtual relationship, compared to reality, does not satisfy an individual's needs for the most part. Physical relationships provide the opportunity for partners to share life experiences and show affection, unlike virtual relationships. Physical contact, sensory integration, and identity uncovering are some of the factors, absent in a virtual affair, but present in a physical one.

Physical contact is an essential ingredient for any relationship; physical contact entails sharing of passionate experiences and display of affection (Robins 47). It often strengthens existing relationships because of the interactions between individuals. Hugs, embraces, holding of hands, cuddles,

massages, and caresses constitute a display of affection. Individuals in virtual relationships, therefore, cannot experience physical contact, hence cannot fulfill all the needs of a given individual.

Sensory integration refers to an individual's ability to organize feelings and senses from their body to the environment. Physical relationships involve a connection of all human senses, especially during intimate relations (Robins 22). Virtual bonds, in contrast, involve fewer senses because of the absence of physical contact. The sense of hearing and that of sight are the only applicable senses in a virtual relationship. The complete satisfaction of a human's needs entails the combination of their senses that result to a robust in their emotions. Virtual relationships experience a dissociation of senses; thus, human encounters may become stale and not accomplish the needs of those involved.

Uncovering the identity of a partner is essential in any relationship. Individuals have different tastes and preferences regarding their relationship partners. Virtual relationship may relay false information about a partner, especially when they are dishonest. Dishonesty among partners is common with virtual unions (Maheu, Marlene, and Rona 59). It is often difficult for an individual to ascertain whether their partner is who they say they are; for example, most individuals lie about their age and background. This makes it hard for a person to establish the identity of their partner hence, may lead an early termination of the relationship. It becomes difficult for virtual relationships to cover all the needs of a person, given the level of their partner's honesty.

Virtual relationships may pose the risk of negative publicity upon an

individual. Negative publicity may occur in instances when a person puts pressure on their partner to add social content to their union. Social content includes pictures and videos; individuals prefer this content to familiarize themselves with their partners. Extreme cases of virtual intimacy may involve sharing of explicit content such as naked pictures among partners. When such content is leaked to the public, especially when disagreements occur, it results into negative hype about an individual, hence traumatizing them (Maheu, Marlene, and Rona 59). It becomes difficult for an individual whose objective is to achieve satisfaction from a virtual relationship, to achieve it in such instances.

An addiction to virtual relationships may lead to destruction of family and marriage relationships when the parties involved are married. Virtual intimacy may lead to cybersex addiction; for example, due to the level of dishonesty associated with internet-based relationships, there is a possibility that most partners are married, and have families to support. Such cases often lead to family break—ups, because the parties involved cannot let go of the virtual life (Scott, Veronica, Karen, Mottarella, and Maria 761). An individual with the aim of establishing a lasting relationship, through the internet, ends up breaking another person's family; hence, their needs are left unfulfilled.

Where do virtual relationships start?

Cyberspace generates virtual relationships. The term cyberspace represents all internet sites that provide a platform for individuals to network and communicate digitally. The most popular cyberspaces that provide the ground for starting and nurturing virtual relationships are dating websites,

chat rooms, forums, and social sites.

Dating websites require a person to fill out their profile, which they display to their users. Some dating sites go to the extent of matchmaking; matchmaking is the process of linking users, who the website management feels have the potential to date. Most individuals visit a dating website with a concrete purpose; for most, finding a lifetime partner is their goal. A person gets to choose a partner from a variety of other subscribed users the website provides. Once they are acquainted with each other, they choose whether to start a relationship or not.

A virtual relationship can also begin from an interaction in a chat room. Some popular chat rooms today include Whatsapp, 2go, Yahoo, TV Room, and 20ish Room. These chat rooms are designed to enable users to share pictures, video, and audio clips hence an enhancement of communication. A user adds their preferred mates to a chat room based on their age, gender, location, and phone number.

Forums and social sites create an enabling environment for two people to start a virtual relationship. Forums are mainly used for review and discussion purposes. Visitors of these forums interact with each other, and may decide to take the interaction a notch higher by creating a virtual relationship. Social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tagged also provide a medium on which people develop virtual affiliations.

Is virtual intimacy becoming naturalized?

Virtual intimacy is becoming naturalized with emerging issues such as ' sexting' and the sharing of social content such as pictures and videos (Scott, Veronica, Karen, Mottarella, and Maria 760). Sexting is a term used to refer

to the sending messages with explicit content across internet sites. With the current rise in internet-based relationships, need to achieve intimacy among partners has increased. Individuals accomplish their intimacy needs by sharing obscene content across websites, to attain a feeling of connection with their partners.

The growth in the numbers of social and dating websites and chat rooms outlines an attempt to naturalize virtual intimacy and relationships (Husley 23). The growth in these sites indicates that there is an increasing demand for virtual relationships and intimacy. People have started viewing virtual intimacy as normal, due to the attempts to naturalize it and its rising demand.

Virtual intimacy has its advantages and disadvantages. The merits regarding time stretching, cost-reduction, convenience, accessibility, and fantasy-driven ideas, are some dimensions of virtual intimacy that makes it preferable to individuals when compared to physical intimacy. There, however, are some demerits associated with virtual intimacy such as dishonesty among partners, negative publicity, and lack of physical contact that prompt researchers to inquire whether virtual relationships meet all individual needs. The decision whether to generate a physical intimate relationship or a virtual one lies on an individual given the positives and negatives associated with each.

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