

The Language of Video Intimacy: Marital Satisfaction Associated with the Use of Web Camera Communication in Long Distance Relationships

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case provides ideas about using video communication in communication and values it may have in distance relationships and implications for increasing the sense of connection in long distance teaching contexts. This study examines influences of Web camera use for married couples in long distance relationships. A research survey explored marital satisfaction with Web camera communication. To measure the satisfaction of participants, the Satisfaction with Married Life Scale from the Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) study, and the relational maintenance strategies from the Stafford and Canary (1991) study are applied. Participants (N = 74) were married, United States citizens, who experienced a geographical separation for more than seven days. Findings suggest that Web camera communication offers a mode in long distance relationships to increase marital satisfaction. Web camera communication may increase the educational satisfaction as a teaching device and assist in linking cultures to expand educational opportunities regardless of geographical location.

BACKGROUND

Technological advances in society have provided new ways for individuals to connect with each other regardless of geographical location. Many scholars have studied mediated forms of communication such as email, instant messaging, telephone, text messaging, chat rooms, and social media networks as well as the effects they have on building and maintaining relationships in society today (e.g., Gennaro & Dutton, 2007; Mesch & Talmud, 2006; Rumbough, 2001; Daly & Knapp, 2002). Although there is an increasing focus on mediated forms of communication, few scholars have chosen to research Web camera communication (e.g., Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007). With the ease of many available programs to facilitate Web camera communication as a method of maintaining and building relationships, and the increase in use of such programs, it seems that Web camera communication may affect relationships.

There seems to be something unique about communication via a video screen in that the communication enhances the impression of a social relationship (Enli & Gunn, 2012). The theory of parasocial interaction suggests that when individuals know another person through video there is a sense of interaction and knowledge that feels more familiar than one might expect (Gardner & Knowles, 2008). This idea is why many television viewers may believe they have a friendship with a television personality they particularly like (e.g., Andy Cohen, David Letterman, Oprah Winfrey) (e.g., Dibble & Rosaen, 2011). Parasocial relationships may be more intense when the viewer is lonely (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). It seems logical that some of the same intensity or impression about interaction that is suggested by parasocial interaction could also affect online video communication.

Features of Web camera communication differ from other forms of mediated communication. Unlike instant messaging or email, Web camera communication offers individuals the ability to see one another, which provides the ability to send and receive nonverbal communication.

Research Question

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between Web camera communication and relationship maintenance, this study will focus on the following research question:

How does Web camera communication affect marital satisfaction in long distance/geographical separations when it is used as a relational maintenance technique?

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