

## Internet-mediated sexuality. New opportunities and threats.

### INTRODUCTION

The Internet is increasingly mediating more and more areas of sexuality. Nicola M. Döring distinguishes the following categories of sexuality on the Internet: sexually explicit material (erotica and pornography), sex education, sexual contacts, sexual subcultures, sex shops, and sex work (Nicola M. Döring, 2012). In each of these areas, users may find new knowledge and new ways to cope but also encounter risks. The biggest concern is the impact on children and adolescents, but adults are also not always able to use online sexual content safely. Moreover, due to the dynamic development of online tools-it's difficult to protect against anything.

An example is the tools used to make sexual contact. Initially, people met and got to know each other through chat rooms, then through social media, and now - to a large extent - through dating apps, which, in turn, are being increasingly upgraded and adapted to users' needs. However, the impact of dating apps is wider than facilitating networking. Similar apps can also cause radical shifts in understanding of sexuality and intimacy (Filice, Parry, & Johnson, 2021) and increase freedom to be shallow and deceitful with self-presentation (Filice, E., Johnson, Parry, & Oakes, 2022).

### METHOD

The paper draws on a review of recent research on online sexuality and observations from the practice of sexual dysfunction therapy.

### RESULTS

Quite a few risks of mediating Internet sexuality can be listed. One of the most common of these is adolescents' exposure to pornography (Nesi, 2022). Another-experiencing (also by children and adolescents) sexual cyber-aggression, which in turn can pose the risk of learning similar behavior and forming negative sexual attitudes (Kizilirmak, A., Sönmez, M., Nacar, G., & Taşhan, S. T. (2022). Teenagers point to insecurity on the Internet, which they associate with violence and pedophilia, among other things (Santos, G., 2021). Another important threat that can negatively affect the development of sexuality is the problematic use of sexual content (Wéry, Maurage, & Billieux, 2022), including, for example, the compulsive use of pornography or the use of the Internet to increase the frequency of sexual contact outside of it.

One of the most challenging threats is disseminating nude/sexual images of people without their consent (Powell, Scott, Flynn, & McCook, 2022). Young people, in particular, are sometimes unable to cope with the deep humiliation they feel due to such actions by their peers.

On the other hand, skillful, conscious use of the Internet can also offer many opportunities. One is sexual emancipation (Alexander, Inglehart, & Welzel, 2020). Another is the mediation of the Internet to sustain sexual contact, such as when a partner/partner is far away, or other difficulties prevent an offline meeting. One study shows that the Internet was used during the pandemic by people having group sex, who used Internet mediation to continue their sexual practices by complying with the isolation order (Fournier, Fulcher, Shumka, Lachowsky, 2021). The Internet can also be a space for social campaigns to protect against abuse and for sex education in the broadest sense. The results of one study on HIV risk awareness and strategies to protect against it showed that frequent use of the Internet correlates with overall greater HIV knowledge (Jones, M. U. et al. 2020).

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