

# Psychological Background of Cybersexual Activities: Qualitative Survey of Specific CMC Communication (among Czech Users)

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## Abstract:

The Internet and computers significantly influence the ways of presenting and consuming sexual content. In the presented study cybersexual activities and their users are surveyed. We understand cybersex as erotically suggestive or explicit messages or sexual fantasies that people exchange via the net. The qualitative survey conducted in 2003 outlined the psychological background of cybersexual activities. It belongs here: (1) needs that contribute to the motivation, (2) perceptions of cybersex, (3) sense of cybersex, (4) influence of cybersex upon the real sex, (5) the advantages of cybersex compared to real sex. In this paper only the first, second and last category are enlarged.

**Keywords:** Internet, online sexuality, sexual behavior, chat rooms, needs, motivation, masturbation, grounded theory

## 1. Introduction

The Internet and computers significantly influence the ways of presenting and consuming sexual content. From time to time there appears the statement about the proportion of Internet visits that are in some way linked to sex. Internet sex, net sex, online sex, compuSex, cybersex, are the terms most frequently used for sexual experiences gained online. Cybersexual activities and their users are surveyed in the presented study.

There are different attitudes to the concept of cybersex. Schneider and Weiss [1] consider every form of sexual expression via the computer or the Internet to be cybersex – from viewing and downloading pornographic materials and subsequent masturbation, through the exchange of erotic messages or reading and writing of sexual letters and stories, to the placing of ads for sexual partners, all the way to love affairs maintained through e-mail and chat. R. Noonan [2], whose definition is used further, understands cybersex only as erotically suggestive or explicit messages or sexual fantasies that people exchange via the net. Masturbation usually forms part of cybersex.

Alvin Cooper [3] stresses three primary factors that facilitate online sexuality. He termed them the *Triple A Engine* (accessibility, affordability, anonymity). Accessibility refers to the fact that on the Internet millions of web pages with pornography are constantly available and in chat rooms one constantly finds people looking for cybersexual experiences. Large quantity of pornography is available for free (affordability) on the Internet. People can move on the Net in complete anonymity and they also perceive communication as anonymous. The components of the Triple A Engine involve a great risk for users who face sexual compulsion or are mentally vulnerable and thus they are prone to compulsive behaviour [3].

Kimberly Young [4] developed a similar model (*ACE model*). According to her the factors that determine the appeal of cybersex are anonymity, convenience and escape. Further facilitating factors are the legality of cybersex, the zero risk of sexually transmitted diseases and easy concealment from the partner.

The first pilot survey of cybersexual behavior among Czech users was conducted in 2003. The qualitative methodology was used and as cybersex were considered only activities, where at least two people participate.

## 2. Methodology

Advanced Internet users, that visit the interactive environments – chatrooms were the target group of the survey. Importance has the number of hours spent in the chat rooms. The necessary condition for submission into the sample was repeated experience with the cybersex.

### 2.1 Data source

The research was conducted through the Internet only (taking advantage of an online disinhibition). The data were obtained from semistructured interviews. The interviews were held with individuals visiting one of the biggest Czech chat server Xchat. Individuals with highest number of hours, with certificate<sup>1</sup> and e-mail address in the profile were selected from the Xchat statistics. Fifty explaining e-mails with the offer to participate on the research were send to them. What can be expected, some of the users have no experience (never practice) with cybersex despite huge amount of hours. On the other hand, some experienced users do not put their e-mail address in the profile. Some of these users were contacted and asked for the interview straight in the sex-oriented chat room. Duration of the interview was between 90 and 250 minutes, mostly 150 minutes. The individuals were pre-admonished, that the interview is saved for subsequent analysis. All the interviews were held on the Internet, in the Xchat chat rooms or using the ICQ.

### 2.2 The description of the sample

Because of the qualitative research design it was not necessary to compose representative sample. In such a specific environment it would be hardly possible. The research file constitutes 19 participants at the age 15 to 39 years, 11 men, 8 women. The most represented group were men at the age 25-29. The scatter table of respondents follows.

age	male	female	total
15 - 19	1	1	2
20 - 24	3	2	5
25 - 29	5	1	6
30 - 34	2	3	5
35 - 39	0	1	1
<b>total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>

No. of hours spent on chat	male	female	total
100 - 199	3	0	3
200 - 499	1	1	2
500 - 999	4	2	6
1000 - 1999	2	4	6
2000 - 2999	1	1	2
<b>total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>

### 2.3 Methods

The basic research method was the analysis of the interviews with the use of Grounded Theory method [5]. This qualitative approach helps to understand the surveyed reality and it builds the theory in areas, where very little is known.

The authors Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser came with the „grounded theory“ in 1967. The principle of this strategy is the theory development from existing data directly, purely inductive without being knowingly prepared as hypothesis. During the research process the emerging structures are continuously categorized and analyzed. The preliminary generated hypothesis and concepts are refined, changed or replaced.

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<sup>1</sup> Certificate means that the identity of the user (gender, name, age) is verified. The certification is granted by the certifier, after the personal meeting.

### 3. Results

Within selective coding some important categories emerge, we titled them jointly *psychological background of cybersexual activities*. It belongs here: (1) needs that contribute to the motivation, (2) perceptions of cybersex, (3) sense of cybersex, (4) influence of cybersex upon the real sex, (5) the advantages of cybersex compared to real sex. In this paper only the first, second and last category are enlarged.

#### 3.1 Needs that contribute to the motivation

Motives that lead individuals to cybersex are usually - albeit not necessarily - conscious. The state of motivational tension is created by an unsatisfied need that can lead an individual to spend a significant amount of time on the Internet. It is important to know that these needs can mutually interact [6]. The survey revealed some of the needs that contribute to the motivation of people who practise cybersex.

*Desire for sexual satisfaction* is a reason often stated by the users. Their real sexual lives do not sufficiently satiate their need for sex.

*Desire for knowledge* appears to be an important motive for cybersexual activities. Children and adolescents enter sex-oriented rooms and gain information about human sexuality and their first "theoretical" sexual experiences. The Internet's anonymity encourages adults to get to know and explore different sexual practices. We consider the possibility to "try it" one of the major factors in the appeal of cybersex. This ability enables an individual to reveal various forms of his/her sexuality when engaged in these activities.

*Desire to be oneself*. For many users, the ability to speak freely about anything, to be open and without any of the masks that they feel are required in real life, is the greatest appeal. In the anonymous Internet environment, fear of rejection and condemnation are less evident and thus they do not force the individual to behave in a conformist way. Many individuals are unable to open up to their closest partners about sex. They might worry that the partner would not accept their sexual desires or that such an attempt could damage the relationship.

*Desire to break*. In order to maintain physical and mental well-being, it is important to take breaks from everyday duties and pressure. For many, the Internet, and particularly chat rooms, became places where they can relax. Many people view cybersex as relaxation or fun.

*Desire to be wanted*. If a person in the real world lacks social relationships to create the feeling of being cared for and of being important for others, that person may attempt to create these feelings through communication in chat rooms. If these feelings are satisfied through cybersex, it is likely that this type of communication will become an important part of the person's life. For many, cybersexual relationships are a way of satisfying the need for friendship and love.

*Desire to find a partner for real sex*. Relationships are established more easily in the chat room than in the real world. Online disinhibition significantly simplifies dating for the shy and introverted, but even for others it is a more convenient and often more effective way of starting new relationships. If an individual, moreover, looks for a person with similar sexual interests, the anonymity of the Internet provides an ideal environment and medium. A significant number of users express the desire to try unusual sexual practices (fetishist, sadomasochism, group sex, etc.) in real life.

*Excitement stemming from anonymity*. An individual can participate in cybersexual activities without having to disclose his identity. The majority of users also claim to appreciate the fact that their cybersexual partner remains anonymous. Users are usually not interested in knowing what their partner looks like; for some it is precisely this anonymity, and the excitement connected with it, that make cybersex attractive.

*Excitement stemming from interaction*. The fact that users prefer cybersex to the "easier" and less time-consuming auto-eroticism with the use of pornographic materials shows the different nature of both possibilities for self-satisfaction. The most important difference lies in interaction provided by cybersex, which cannot be

provided by a magazine or by a video. For some, the fact that they are talking to someone else can itself be as exciting as the content of the conversation.

The categories of "excitement stemming from anonymity" and "excitement stemming from interaction" differ from the others in that these categories are not needs, and thus cannot be primary motives. The excitement is intrinsic to the activity on the Internet. It can, however, be very strong motive for returning to cybersexual activities.

### **3.2 Perceptions of cybersex**

Cybersexual activities are perceived differently, even among the users themselves. Some reasons that users cite for cybersex include:

***Cybersex as a substitute for real sex.*** Those individuals who have no access to real sex or those who consider their sexual lives unsatisfactory view cybersex in this manner.

***Cybersex as a different form of sex and a supplement to real sex.*** A large proportion of the users consider cybersex a pleasant variation in their sexual lives. If they have a partner, it can be a way of escaping from the stereotype of a couple's sexual life and remaining "faithful". It is often used by partners if they cannot be together physically, or as a form of foreplay.

***Cybersex as a pleasant feature in auto-eroticism.*** A number of users view their cybersexual activities the same way as masturbation. They place this type of auto-eroticism in the same category as viewing pornographic materials. They often stress that thanks to the possibility of talking to someone it is much more pleasant and interesting.

### **3.3 The advantages of cybersex compared to real sex**

For some participants cybersex has certain advantages also compared to real sex. The users themselves usually state the following:

***Easy access.*** If one has access to the Internet at home, in the dorm or elsewhere in private he can access sexual conversation and cybersex very quickly and easily.

***Lack of commitment.*** Cybersex does not make one responsible, it does not involve a commitment unless the individual wants it.

***Greater openness and relaxation.*** If one feels safe and does not have any responsibility then he will be more relaxed and open in his conduct (in this case communication). Evidently one "only" communicates here. but communicates about what he does, what imaginary sexual activities he engages in. Cybersex enables him to try out his secret sexual desires within the safety of his home.

***Possibility to set limits.*** Although a certain sexual activity is the user's secret fantasy, it does not mean that he will like its realization. Something that was not a part of the fantasy might occur. Cybersex allows him to be in control over "what is happening".

***Unimportance of physical and personal attributes.*** Unless a camera is present the users have basically no way of verifying who they communicate with. This enables users to develop their own fantasies, to create the ideal partner. In the environment of the chat room there is no disadvantaging due to physical appearance. The ability to verbally express fantasies and ideas is important.

***Possibility of satisfaction according to one's needs.*** The individual can be satisfied in the way he finds the most pleasant. This is true for the type of fantasies accompanying cybersex, the use of pornographic materials and also for auto-erotic stimulation.

***It is not considered infidelity.*** Individuals involved in cybersex usually do not feel that they cheat on their real partners. In case feelings of remorse appear it is usually when an emotional bond with the cybersexual partner is established.

#### 4. Conclusions

Considering that the results are coming from a qualitative survey, they can not be generalized to the world's cybersex users population. In any case it makes possible to enter the specific world of cybersex users. It approaches the way they behave (in chat rooms and outside them), they regard, perceive, and apprehend their activity. It contributes to understanding of the aspects of new phenomenon in human sexuality and human communication.

The consumption of cybersex can become pathological. Some studies have referred to so called cybersexual addiction [1], [3]. We do not concentrate on the pathology as most of the studies do. Our aim is to explore the cybersexual activity, from psychological point of view, as a new kind of human behavior. In the following study we will ask, what positive impacts these activities can bring into the human life, sexuality and the changes it brings to them.

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