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Sylvie Franz Pousaz*

THE PSYCHOLOGY AND INTERNET

Brief general idea of the literature

The principal trend of the research in social sciences, in psychology and communication is to describe the nature of the difference between face to face (FTF) interaction and on-line interaction and to examine our on-line context can influence our behaviour (Wallace, 1999).

The central questions on my subject of study, which is on-line psychological relationship, are the question of anonymity, and missing of non-verbal cues and emotional cues.

Anonymity

The authors (Wallace, 1999; Young, 1990) agree on the effect of desinhibition that procures Internet. as a mean of communication. In that sense, Internet is a space privilégié to experiment construction and modification of personality, the media being without physical limit, constraint of context (Turkle, 1995). So it helps for the confidence. On the other hand, it exists a fuzzy frontier between reality and virtuality.

Studies on self-help groups show that some groups of people benefits more for the help on Internet. The characteristics of the groups are the stigmatised person like homosexuals, social phobia, sexual abused etc., specially the person who have non-visible problems. An explanation is that the obscurity of Internet helps to the open of the self and to facilitate a feeling of identity and acceptation (McKenna & al., 1998).

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Verbal versus non verbal cues

The central question is "how to established a form of therapeutic contact in the Internet setting"?

The resistance on e-therapy is especially due to the lack of non-verbal keys. The ability of therapists to detect the client's resistance based on non-verbal keys is handicapped by Internet and it's difficult to make a diagnostic and the adapted treatment. The text based communication risks to be misleading, with misunderstanding and projections. So, it's not therapy but virtual therapy. The therapy is more efficiency if it is accompanied by traditional therapy or in post treatment. (Pena, 2002).

According to Rice (1997), the missing of direct contact between the therapist and the client and the formalism based on the exchange of letters can seriously limit the ability of therapist to take care of a client and to show a positive regard. The therapist in this context is more a counsellor (advices giver).

On the other hand, from the studies of CMC, we learn that there is a new shape of communication which is nearest from a oral form than the written form. So, there are spontaneous communication, persuasive expressions and no explicitation of the context of the discourse. There are also some narrative elements like in writing.

Descriptive Analyse of 20 Internet sites on the on-line psychological relation

To approach our subject and to fit better the reality of this field, we have taken the option to see what really exists like psychological services on Internet, under the aspects of offer and demand. For that, we have adopted the same position as anybody who looks for psychological help on Internet.

Methodology

We have used very common search engines, like google.com, yahoo.com, metor.com, Ixquick.com, altavista.com.

The key words were the following: psy* and Internet, psy on-line, consultation psy, consulta psicologica en linea, "relation d'aide", psy* on-line, "orientation and Internet", psychology counselling.

We analyse the site with a pre-established grid inspired from a study of quality (http://www.e-qualite.com/): 1. reach the potential public to

whom the site is addressed? 2. Home page 3. Identification and a priori confidence 4. Navigation: comfort and find the information 5. Content: what ? who? To whom? And How? 6. Contact Name

The two last categories were added for the needs of our research.

Summary of Results

I write it down only general results and not the details.

General report

- No career counselling sites offer on-line services on many sessions. The help is more on information and directs toward physical resources (books / persons).
- The most sites offer information on studies, learning, CV and motivation letters. They address to a young public from 18 to 25 years old.
- There are very heavy to navigate: a lots of different information like books, pub, images, texts.

The similarity between the sites

- There is a commercial culture: price decreases with the number of session; from a number of minutes, the services are free. The services are presented under form of package. The first session is refunded if the client is unsatisfied. There is also possible "bon-therapy".
- The term of session appears: it defines like one question-one response.
- Population: there is almost ever restriction for suicidal person or to serious psychopathology.
- It exists a free forum besides a paid service.
- When it is question-response form of help, the response is given in the 48 hours.
- No message on the confidentiality (one site) or the question of security
- No ethical charter (2 sites propose one).
- The term to nominate help are various: psychological help via e-mail or chat, on-line counselling, cyberanalysis, on-line therapy, e-therapy, web-counseling

Differences between sites

- USA and Canadian sites are more modest than European: They precise what they cannot offer; They stress attention on the experimental state of e-therapy.
- In USA; they exist on-line counselling and mental health organisms: National Directory of On-line Counselor (NDOC), International Society of Mental Health Online (ISMHO).
- One site is a portal offer joining between therapist and client and gives therapists' evaluation in number of starlight.

Research questions and Hypothesis

Based on the lecture and on our preliminary study, I can formulate my followed research questions:

1. Does it exist a specific on-line psychological help service?
2. What is the utility of these on-line services?

Hypothesis

1. It exists an other setting for on-line psychological help services than in face to face.
2. The offer and the demand aren't the same in on-line services.
3. A culture of psychological help emerges from the Internet environment.