The Influence of Loneliness on Deception in an Online Chat Room

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Introduction

Recent literature has investigated loneliness as a function of psychological well-being in online chat rooms. Galanxhi and Nah (2007) examined deception in online chat rooms to see if people who lie in online chat rooms experience increased levels of anxiety compared to individuals who tell the truth. They found that participants who were instructed to lie had increased levels of anxiety compared to participants who told the truth. Participants who lied were also more likely to choose an avatar that did not closely resemble themselves. Another study done by Whitby (2002) studied how often people tell the truth and how open they are in online chat rooms. She found that participants who spent 0-2 hours per week chatting online were more guarded and lied more about themselves than those who spent 11-21 hours online. However, current research has yet to explore loneliness in relation to lying in online chat environments. In the current study, we examined how loneliness and honesty in an online chat room relate to one another.

Hypotheses

1. Given that we know loneliness is an important factor to consider when looking at the amount of time spent using the internet and in online chat rooms, I predicted that people with increased levels of loneliness will be more likely to lie in an online chat room.

Methods

Participants

The present study included 89 undergraduate psychology students at Eastern Kentucky University, each of whom received course credit for their participation. Participants gave their informed consent before participating in the survey.

Survey Task

A survey was conducted to examine loneliness levels and honesty in online chat rooms. Subjects were given a survey that contained three sections. The first section measured their loneliness through a series of 20 questions from Version 3 of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1980). The second section, honesty in online chat rooms, was measured using 10 questions in the chat room survey I created. In the third section, the amount of time participants chatted online was measured using five questions asking about their internet use in the chat room survey.

Discussion

• In the present study, we examined if loneliness and lying in an online chat room have a relationship.
• It was found that loneliness and deception in an online chat room did produce a positive correlation.
• How often participants lacked companionship (question 4) was positively correlated to loneliness scores.
• The findings show that people who are lonely are more likely to lie in online chat rooms. Therefore, in order to eradicate lying from online chat rooms researchers may want to examine online gaming and how being part of a video game group relates to loneliness and lying in chat rooms. If a lonely person is actively participating in a video game group, they may feel less lonely and then be less likely to lie. This would be compared to when lonely people just chat online so researchers can examine if feeling as though they are a part of a group decreases how often they lie or if they lie at all.
• Also in future studies, it is important researchers continue to explore the relationship between loneliness and dishonesty in chat rooms. An experiment needs to be done to determine causality. Since my study used only college students as participants, future studies also need to broaden their sample to get an accurate measure of external validity.

References

• Whitby, M.T. (2002). Lie, liar! An examination of how open, supportive and honest people are in chat rooms. Computers in Human Behavior, 18, 341-352