

Mediating Desire: Language, Gender, Sexuality and Technology

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This paper examines sex, sexuality, and desire in naturally occurring synchronous conversations in an online community that was not sexual in scope or purpose, but where such communication was persistent and prevalent. Conversational logs from public and private 'rooms' within the virtual community are analysed, and the findings demonstrate that the participants engage in sexual conversations (e.g., automated sexual commands, joking, self-disclosure, sexting/cybersex) that make use of the spatial and technical resources available to them, and that there are specific interactional patterns for each genre of sex talk.

While participants are often creative and innovative in their discursive strategies (e.g., treating automated sexual commands as games, use of space and privacy settings) and narrative perspectives, these are typically located within frames of heteronormativity. Additionally, participants' successful use of sexuality and desire in conversation demonstrates their in-group status and communicative competence. For participants of the community, to know what to say, how to say it, where, to whom, and in what context demonstrates an awareness and understanding of both group-specific and societal norms of sexuality and desire.