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Survey on verbal and non-verbal behaviors in real and virtual world.

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Abstract

This survey summarizes a larger diploma project. It is based on people's behaviors mainly on Facebook, but it includes observations on specialized forums, comments under blog posts, news, etc. Its purpose is to be useful for counselors and therapists, who do not have experience on the web, and to help them understand their clients better and to detect the real problems with their client's communication in virtual and real space. Basing on the Reichian theory of the five human characters, this survey is a brief comparison between typical verbal and non-verbal behaviors in real life and in the virtual world of the Internet. The main conclusion is that the behavior on the web is more congruent to the character than in real life communication.

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Keywords: Reichian character; Facebook; virtual and real communication; assertiveness; energetic blocks; character fears; schizoid character; oral character; masochistic character; psychopathic character; rigid character.

1. Introduction

I have been interested in the topic of this survey for more than three years. It is a result of my experience as an active blogger and as an active user of one of the most popular social webs Facebook. But it has been provoked by the fact that for the last three years as a body psychotherapist I have had to work with a lot of clients' problems emerging during their virtual contacts, particularly on Facebook. I was influenced by the fact that modern people spend about 60% of their free time on-line, and part of them live mainly in the virtual reality and this cannot be ignored. It is based on people's behaviors mainly on Facebook, but it includes observations on specialized forums, comments under blog posts, news, etc. Its purpose is to be useful for counselors and therapists, who do not have experience on the web, and to help them understand their clients better and to detect the real problems with their client's communication in virtual and real space. In order to compare people's behaviors virtually and really, I used Reichian theory of human character (W. Reich, A. Lowen, G. Pierrakos, etc.). According to this theory the character is seen as a function of energetic blocks result of childhood traumas and fears of painful experience. The character is presented in the world by a mask (persona), which is the character behaviors conformable to the reality stimuli. And according to Reich they can be observed in the body

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structure. And these blocks, or interruptions, determine specific ways of thinking and behavior which form five character structures: schizoid, oral, masochistic, psychopathic, and rigid. But I accepted the names given by Canadian personal growth counselor Lise Bourbeau: escaping, dependent, enduring, controlling and stiff – because they put an accent on the main character's avoiding behavior used to avoid touching the character trauma and when working with clients these names sound more acceptable.

My hypothesis was that in virtual communication the mask is more congruent to the character because we are not so alert. The intercession of written speech on Facebook makes communication easier. My finding was that although we cannot observe the body language, proxemics, intonation, the character on Facebook can be recognized by statuses, comments, syntax, specific words, likes and dislikes, friends lists, photos, music and shared information and preferences, the topics discussed etc. On the Internet we can get more easily information about the person's lacking behaviors and dysfunctional behaviors which create problems with satisfying the individual's needs.

2.0 The five Reichian characters on Facebook

2.1 Escaping (schizoid) character

Such individuals tend to perceive the world as being hostile and threatening due to a trauma of being unwanted and unsafe. As a result, their behavior is determined by the fear of physical contact, and they escape by mentally going away in an imaginary world in which to satisfy the needs of intimacy. They achieve avoidance of excitement by dissociation or splitting the head off the body or the thoughts off the feelings and the result is constant withdrawal from the world mentally and emotionally. That is why, the social activities in the real world are not preferred by them and they compensate this through the escape into spirituality, virtual reality, or working in isolation as artists, web designers, etc. And bearing in mind this, the fact that this character is the main habitant of the social webs is understandable. On Facebook one can observe this splitting between the real and virtual personality: sometimes they use more than two different profiles or anonymous profiles, they steal other people's pictures and attach them as their profile pictures, or usually they hide behind pictures of abstract things or fantastic creatures. If they choose to put their own picture, the focus is on the head or only the eyes: the observer gets the feeling that the eyes do not look at a definite real object, they look as if beyond, without emotions. There are no full size pictures because for these people the body is the emanation of the real physical world which is rejected or denied.

The topics of the statuses are example of their affinity with spirit and spiritual practices. They express their contemplations using abstract, absolute and sometimes scattered and utterly contradictory statements in different posts on one and the same topic. The message this character subconsciously conveys is, "My fantasy is the world and this world is the only one. And I believe it is real." They project their internalized hostility onto others. This way they reject people, not allowing them to get nearer, although the most feared thing for them is to feel like nonexistent. Words like "nobody", "no one", "nothing", "disappear", "not interested", etc. are preferred and used more than often. They make the comments as abruptly and rudely as they disappear from the chat without closing the situation. Their aggression is cold and full of omnipotence which is not tested in reality, not measured according to the situation. But in case of clash between their reality and an opinion which is stronger and more grounded than their own, they freeze or do not stand firmly by themselves. Although their favorite topics are eternal universal love and spiritual union, their comments lack empathy and are full of cold hostility, which is not perceived consciously by them as something which expels people from the communication with them. We have to understand that their aggressive comments are their only way to express any feelings and sometimes it is their only way to establish contact, even courtship. Some of these individuals are heralds of new ideas, or of positive thinking of so called "new age spirituality", and most of them are extremely creative. They can realize their ideas constructively, if they cooperate with more grounded people with good reality checking ability.

The psychological work with them consists of entering their fantasy world without rejecting and arguing with it and trying to connect the body and the head through a lot of body work and physical grounding activities to encourage their entering in the social world and activities.

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