Digital Romance: A research project exploring young people’s use of technology in their romantic relationships and love lives

# Details

## Year

2017

## Issued

2017

## Language

English

## Authors

McGeeney E.; Hanson E.

## Type

Report and working paper

## Place

London

## Topics

## Sample

UK wide online survey: 2,135 young people aged 14-24
Interviews: 10 young people aged 14-25
Focus groups: 13 focus groups involving 69 young people aged 11-20

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Healthcare

# Abstract

N/A, see results

# Outcome

"Concluding thoughts
Digital Romance set out to explore the role of digital
technology in young people’s love lives and romantic
relationships. We wanted to know about the positives
and the negatives of using technology and to better
understand the challenges young people faced.
We also wanted to use these insights to improve
education for young people.
The centrality and affordances of technology
The research revealed that technology enables and
facilitates lots of positives in young people’s lives
such as relational intimacy, connection, friendship
and the ability to feel ‘more me’.
It was refreshing to hear of the ways in which
technology had enabled intimate and supportive
relationships that would otherwise not have occurred
(especially for those in minority groups and those
who had felt isolated or less confident in face-to-face
interactions). We also heard about the ways in which
technology had supported many young people in
flirting, having fun, becoming closer, communicating
and expressing desires, and building confidence.
Some also described technology as affording them
with positive control, some freedom from negative
judgements and pressures, and space to be authentic.
Furthermore we found that social media is often
used in positive ways in challenging situations. There
were examples of technology being used to offer
public support, to publicly condemn unkindness
and discrimination, and to coordinate group efforts
against those posing a risk or acting harmfully.
When it came to the negatives, young people’s
experiences and views demonstrated that technology
could exacerbate the ‘drama’ of their relationships,
and that some apps and platforms can be conducive
to commenting (at times critically) on others’
appearance, interfering in others’ relationships and
break-ups, as well as cheating and jealousy. We
also saw that technology provides opportunities to
verbally abuse, control and apply sexual pressure, and
can make it easy to hurt others on the back of difficult
post break-up feelings. Furthermore it facilitates
stranger ‘hook ups’ (with their attendant risks) and
the phenomenon of sharing others’ personal images
without consent. These harms and risks were not
experienced equally by all young people; some
disproportionately affected LGBT young people,
young women and/or those without supportive and
open relationships with peers or adults. Many of our
findings pointed to interactions between sexism,
restrictive gender norms and technology, leading to
harmful individual and group practices in particular
towards girls. For example, high proportions reported
frequent judgements on their appearance, and
pressure to send sexual images and engage in sexual
activity.
Education and support: themes
and useful directions of travel
The research highlighted that some education (in
particular online safety) was generally being done
well and having an impact and that many young
people felt well supported in their online relationships
by parents and youth workers. Alongside this, the
majority of young people reported that they were
not receiving adequate education on relationships,
and some also shared experiences of adults in their
lives being judgmental or disinterested, both of which
served to increase risk and harm.
Their experiences and views provided many insights
into how education and support might usefully
evolve. There was a clear rejection of risk-only
perspectives that was experienced as failing to
engage with the reality that technology has benefits
for young people from all communities." (McGeeney and Hanson, 2017: 46).