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978-1-107-40597-4 - Love Online: Emotions On The Internet

Aaron Ben-Ze'ev

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Love Online

“Computers have changed not just the way we work but the way we love. Falling in and out of love, flirting, cheating, even having sex online have all become part of the modern way of living and loving. Yet we know very little about these new types of relationship. How is an online affair where the two people involved may never see or meet each other different from an affair in the real world? Is online sex still cheating on your partner? Why do people tell complete strangers their most intimate secrets? What are the rules of engagement? Will online affairs change the monogamous nature of romantic relationships?” These are just some of the questions Professor Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, distinguished writer and academic, addresses in the first full-length study of love online. Accessible, shocking, entertaining, enlightening, this book will change the way you look at cyberspace and love for ever.

AARON BEN-ZE'EV is Rector of the University of Haifa, Professor of Philosophy and Co-Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Emotions at the University of Haifa. He has published extensively on emotion, most recently *The Subtlety of Emotions* (2000).

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To Ruth, my real love

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Preface

Paradise is exactly like where you are right now . . . only
much, much better.

Laurie Anderson

Nowadays, one of the most exciting social, as well as romantic, sites to visit is cyberspace. At any moment, millions of people across the globe are surfing that space, socializing with each other or having romantic affairs. Their number is growing by the minute. What is the lure of the Net? Why do people feel compelled to leave the comfortable surroundings of their actual world and immerse themselves in this seductive space? Why are emotions so intense in this seemingly imaginary world? Are we witnessing the emergence of new types of emotions and romantic relationships? What is the future of romantic relationships and prevailing bonds such as marriage?

In this book two topics are analyzed: cyberspace and emotions. Whereas emotions have been at the center of our everyday life throughout the development of human beings, cyberspace has been accorded such a central role only in recent years. Many thinkers have contributed to various debates about emotions, but the more systematic study of emotions has only recently become the focus of substantial academic investigations. Cyberspace is itself a relatively recent phenomenon and the academic community has just begun to collect and publish data and to formulate theories about it.

In my book, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, I presented a comprehensive framework for understanding emotions in our everyday life. The present book seeks to apply this framework to the rapidly growing instances of online relationships. It focuses upon a few central emotions that occur in cyberspace, and in particular romantic love and sexual desire. I examine the nature of these emotions in cyberspace and compare them to their counterparts in offline circumstances. There is no doubt that intense, real

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emotions are present in online affairs – otherwise, such affairs would not be so popular. However, the reasons for the generation of such emotions are not readily apparent.

The Internet has a profound impact upon the extent and nature of romantic and sexual relationships. Describing this impact may be helpful in coping with the online romantic and sexual revolution and in predicting the future development of these relationships.

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