



Part II: Learning Objectives

1. Participants will be able to define and provide examples of Internet-related (online) intimacy problems
2. Participants will learn the 7 vulnerabilities that contribute to Internet-related intimacy problems
3. Participants will a multi-theoretical framework for understanding how technology and new media impact couple and family life

We all know an online
intimacy problem when we see
it...





But what does it *really* mean?

- Broadly defined as interpersonal issues occurring when computer-mediated communication interferes with online relationships or offline relationships.
- Embedded within this definition are three key concepts: online, intimacy, and problems (Hertlein & Desruisseaux, in press)



"online"

- Refers to one of two circumstances
 - One participation in online activities to the exclusion of their primary offline relationship
- OR
- One's engagement with another person online



"intimacy"


- Closeness, openness and vulnerability with one another
- Moss and Schwebel (1993):
 - determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experienced with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship. (p. 33).
- Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) found that intimacy is made up of self-disclosure and partner disclosure, which are mediated by perceived partner responsiveness.

Ongoing (Schaefer & Olson, 1981)




"problems"

- Problematic Internet usage can mean a variety of things, from interpersonal issues (such as Internet infidelity) (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Campbell, 2000; Schneider, 2002) to unethical or criminal behavior (such as cyberstalking).
- Might involve both costs to the primary (and often offline) relationship (such as termination of the relationship) as cited by Barak and Fisher (2000) and Schneider (2002) or costs to the individual psyche, such as pronounced feelings of shame, guilt, and other complicated emotions (Cooper et al, 2000).
Does the behavior disrupt the intimacy in the primary couple's relationship, regardless of whether the primary relationship is facilitated offline or facilitated online?



**Therefore, online intimacy problems
are defined as...**

- Any disruption to a couple's intimacy (defined as levels of emotional self-disclosure and the perception of a partner's responsiveness) that is facilitated, in some degree, by online activities or behavior



Specific types of online intimacy problems

- Online infidelity
 - Social Networking (see Cheng, Phil, Chan, & Tong, 2006, Henderson & Gilding, 2004, Rau, Gao & Ding, 2008, van Manen, 2010).
 - Online Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Gaming (Liu & Kuo 2007, Peters & Malesky, 2008)
- Others??

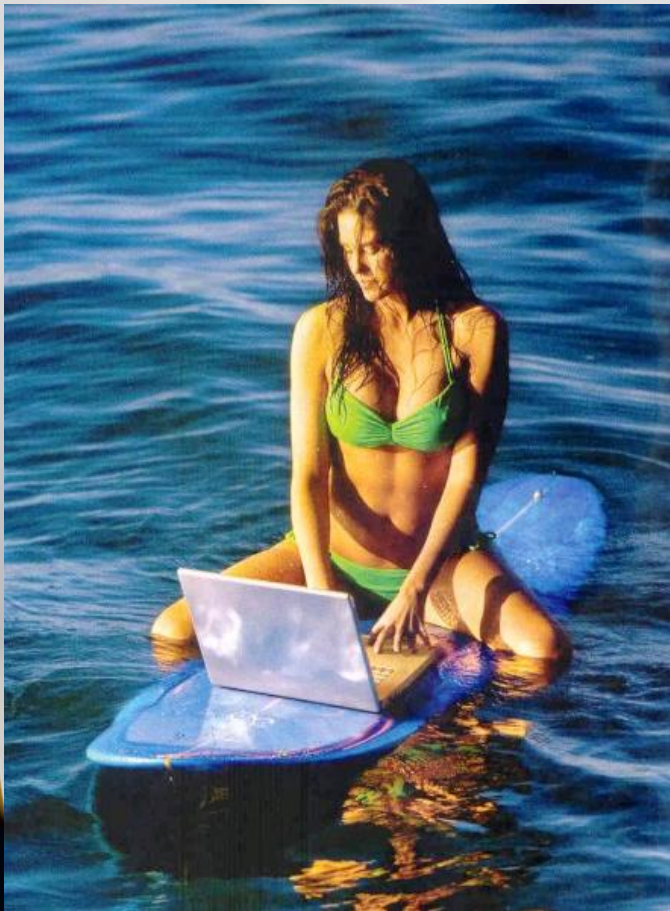
Ecological Influences



7
WAYS
THE INTERNET
IS RUINING
YOUR LIFE



#1: Accessibility



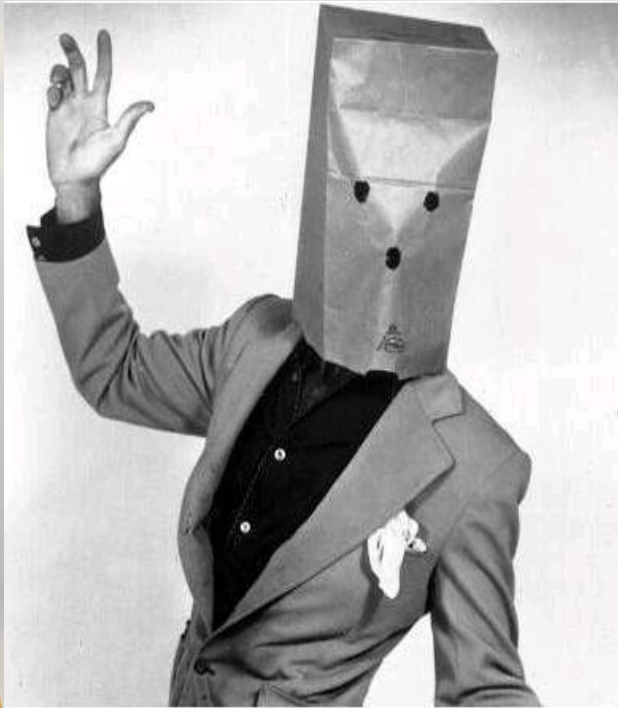
- Daily and unlimited access/opportunity from many locations—homes, workplaces, eateries, coffee shops, hospitals, PDAs and cell phones (Cooper, 2002).
- Negative work spillover (Campbell & Ling, 2009; Chelsey, 2005)

#2: Affordability

- Simple monthly service charge from an Internet service provider
- No receipts
(Cooper, 2002)



#3: Anonymity



- “Enhances one’s ability to promote any chosen identity.” (Hertlein & Sendak, 2007, p. 4)
- Problems when the user decides to hide pertinent aspects of him/her in order to pursue a relationship (Cooper, 2002)

#4: Acceptability

- Much of the behavior on the Internet that has been deemed inappropriate in society has found a way to be an accepted way of life on the Internet (King, 1999)



Mike McMahon / AP

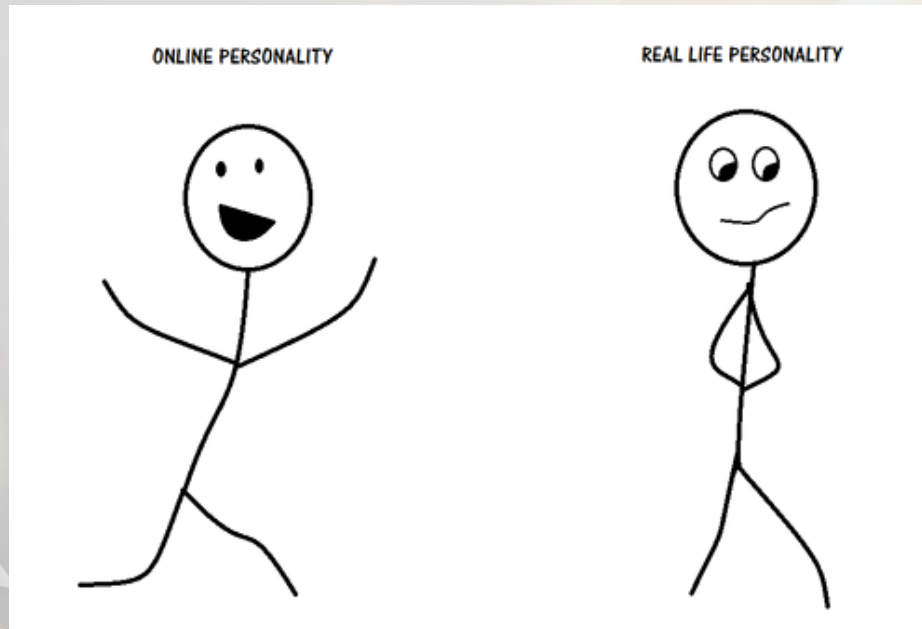


#5: Approximation

- The quality about the Internet which approximates real world situation as the internet can often be found blurring the line between fantasy and action (Ross & Kauth, 2002; Tikkanen & Ross, 2003)
- The mechanics of the message (e.g., grammar) are equally as important as the text itself (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

#6: Accommodation

- Internet provides greater opportunity for one to act a certain way in "real time" but have a different persona when it comes to online behavior and activities (Hertlein & Stevenson, 2010)



#7: Ambiguity

- Difficulty of defining online behaviors as problematic
- Definitions, interpretations, contracts (Hertlein & Stevenson, 2010)



Implications for Structure





Rules

- Couples who do not revisit interpersonal rules as they integrate technology into their household may perceive their partner as functioning in detrimental ways (Daneback, Cooper, & Månsson, 2005)
- Other rules include those around how to handle a ringing cell phone in a social situation, often informed by who is around them, their knowledge about who is on the other end of the phone, their location, and other relevant information (Humphreys, 2005).



Roles

- In some ways, parents' roles have diminished because children and adolescents are more adept at using communicative technologies than adults (Aarsand, 2007).
- Parents have to walk a line between trusting the blocking software and addressing the issue directly with their children.
- Another functional change may be evident in how diffuse boundaries affect interactions between parents.




Boundaries

- The Internet provides “increasingly blurred boundaries between offline and online social relationships as individuals interact using multiple channels of communication, expecting a reconfiguration of their own or their household’s social circle.” (Mesch & Talmud, 2007, pg. 585).
- How couples function is based, to some degree, on their perceived boundaries within their structure.
 - For example, one partner may believe that the boundary that has been violated necessitates that they function differently (e.g., partners become more overprotective).



Boundaries (cont...)

- Boundaries also become blurred because children can access a wide range of information on the Internet regardless of the appropriateness, some of it sexual (Freeman-Longo, 2000).
- Other research has focused how the blurred boundaries between work and home interfere with couple and family functioning, especially interfering with boundaries and one's sense of control over the boundaries (Campbell & Ling, 2009).
- increased opportunity for violence in online interactions and relationships



Technology and new media influence boundaries in that it introduces parties who are known and parties who are not known into couple and family relationships.

Implications for Process





Formation

- Couples who do not revisit interpersonal rules as they integrate technology into their household may perceive their partner as functioning in detrimental ways (Daneback, Cooper, & Månsson, 2005)
- Other rules include those around how to handle a ringing cell phone in a social situation, often informed by who is around them, their knowledge about who is on the other end of the phone, their location, and other relevant information (Humphreys, 2005).



Intimacy development

- Participation in online activities can enhance intimacy and feelings of closeness between partners (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002)
- May be the result of more frequent interactions, multiple methods of interaction (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; DiMaggio, Hargitti, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001), and higher levels of self-description and communication (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997; Henline & Harris, 2006).



Maintenance: Timing and Tempo

- Influences daily rhythms and routines (Dimmick, Feaster, & Hoplamazian, 2011).
- Couples also more heavily rely on cell phones (as opposed to other forms of technology) to talk to their partner during a day (70% of people report doing this, if both partners have cell phones) (Kennedy et al, 2008).
- There are more frequent and often shorter communications (primarily through email) occurring any time of day (Wilding, 2006).




Maintenance: Communication with Extended Family

- Communication technologies have become inexpensive, user-friendly, and provide a number of ways to communicate with family members at a greater geographical distance (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011; Wilding, 2006).
- The recent advancements in cellular technology helped remote communities sustain familial and community networks (Horst & Miller, 2006) and can bring families together in treatment (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2006).



Maintenance: Commitment in Relationships

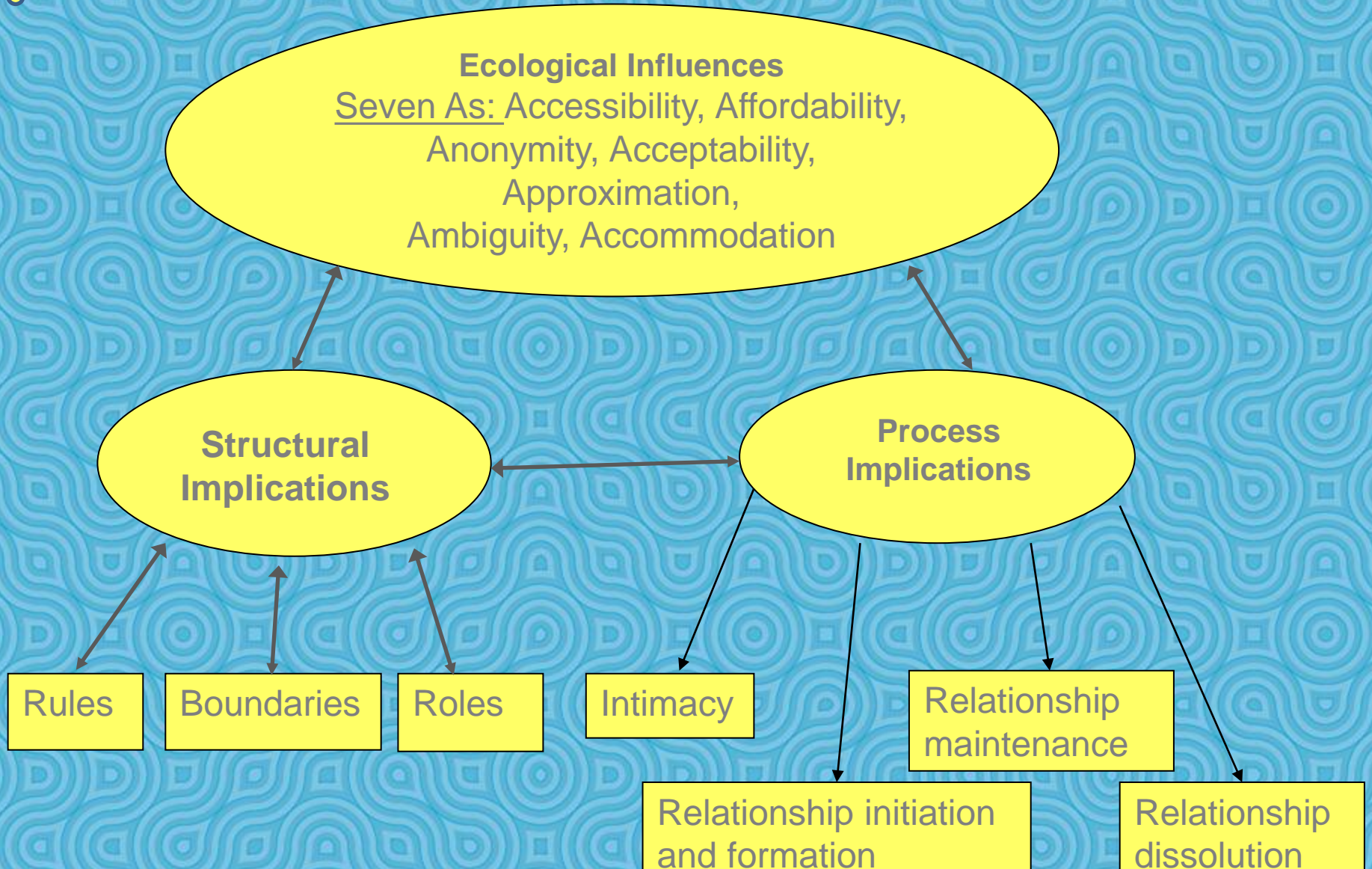
- Previous research found that people in computer-mediated relationships reported less commitment than those in face-to-face relationships (Ma, 1996).
- People in online relationships experienced greater levels of commitment, citing increased amount of personal self-disclosure as the reason (Yum & Hara, 2006).
- Email communication fosters greater levels of commitment and trust between siblings (Eppler & Walker, 2004).



Dissolution

- Relationship dissolution can occur in a variety of ways—death, divorce, or physical and/or psychological separation.
- Technology influences relationships and can play a part in their endings.
 - Facebook statuses
 - The way relationship dissolution is negotiated

A Multitheoretical Framework





Fitting it all together

- First, the specific aspects of technology affect both the structure and process of relationships.
- Secondly, shifts in the structure of relationships can dictate changes in the processes of relationships and vice versa.
 - Anonymity (an ecological factor) in computer-mediated communication can serve to reinforce boundaries in social groups (a structural factor) (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998).
 - Rules around cell phone usage may result in changes to the way that adolescents interact with friends and family (structure to process changes).
 - More examples?



Putting it into practice

- Role model

Distinguishing Internet Issues Across Dimensions

Dimension	Internet Addiction	Internet Sex Addiction	Internet Infidelity
Involved Parties	Primarily an individual activity	Primarily an individual activity	Primarily a relational activity; generally an identifiable third person
View of Problem	Characterized by time (amount of hours) spent on the Internet	Characterized by the content of activities, online or otherwise	Characterized by the content of activities online; time spent online is primarily conducted in secret from the primary partner
Physical Symptoms	Tolerance, withdrawal are key concepts with regard to online opportunities	Tolerance, withdrawal are key concepts with regard to exposure to sexually explicit material	Tolerance, withdrawal do not play a part
Presence/Absence of Addictive Properties	Speed, accessibility, potency of information are factors	Speed, accessibility, potency of information are factors	Relationship, sexual, and connection are factors



Assessment items

- • ACCESSIBILITY: ask what the rules around usage are in the home? Who has access to whose passwords?
- Normalize need for trading passwords for a while;
- physical boundaries versus psychological (identify the boundaries
- • AFFORDABILITY: Ask what is the cost to the relationship
- • ANONYMITY and ACCOMMODATION: Ask how the individual has a need to be a certain way that is difficult in the context of the relationship.
- • ACCEPTABILITY: Ask questions about surrounding the social network of the couple
- • APPROXIMATION: ask about what might be good to include in the relationship that the couple is getting online
- • AMBIGUITY: Develop a definition with a couple