

Couple and Family Technology: The Emergence of a New Discipline

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1

Prevalence of Technology in Daily Life

- Of the nearly 7 billion people in the world, just over 2 billion people are online (Internet Usage Stats, 2011), a 484% increase over the last decade.
- In late 2011, the Global Language Monitor reported that "Web 2.0" was officially accepted as the 1 millionth English word (Global Language Monitor, 2011), following the addition of "sexting", "noob", "cloud computing", and "defriend."

2

The Rise of the Machines: Personal Computing

- The projected 170 million personal computers to be purchased in 2010 was only half of the actual total purchased – an estimated 340 to 350 million worldwide (Computer Industry Almanac, 2010).
- Approximately 58% of married couples with children (U.S.) live in households with two or more computers.
- 70% of the population surveyed had computers with Internet access at their home (U.S. Census, 2009) compared to 18% in 1997.

3

The Rise of the Machines: Cell Phones

- Just over 80% of American adults have a cell phone (Smith, 2011) and 95% of people in Korea own a cell phone (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2011).
- Half of children own a personal cell phone in both the U.S. and Japan (Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005; Kennedy et al., 2008).
- 25% of homes have no landline and rely on a cell phone (Blumberg & Luke, 2010).
- People may prefer mobile communication as the method by which they connect with their friends and acquaintances (Hampton, Sessions, Her, & Rainie, 2009).



4

The Rise of the Applications: Online Video Games

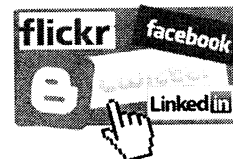
- 72% of American homes have a resident who plays computer or video games (Entertainment Software Association, 2011)
- In 2010, gaming revenues were over \$25 billion and that number is expected to increase (NPD Group, 2011).
- While a predominant belief that the typical gamer is in their adolescence or early adulthood, the prevalence of gaming in the adult population is the most striking



5

The Rise of the Applications: Social Networking

- Facebook boasts over 1 million users, coming second in terms of Internet traffic only to Google (Alexa, 2012).
- Access to social networking sites occurs approximately one in every four minutes (Nielsen, 2010).



6

Implications of Increased Usage in Relationships

Couples and families may operate the same as we did in previous generations, the ways we accomplish the tasks are different.



Would it kill you to update your Twitter status if you're going to stay out so late?

7

Implications are both physical and psychological!

- Tension in one's shoulders, tightening of the neck, and shallow breathing (Lin & Peper, 2009).
- More stress upon receiving a text message (Lin & Peper, 2009)
- Hupert et al (2004) found that a rather large sample of college students experienced neck, shoulder and other pain in the upper body.

8

What is the Field of Couple and Family Technology?

- Refers to a broad area of investigation which seeks to understand the effect of technology on relationships of individuals, couples and family.
- Attends to both the challenges that interfere with couple and family processes and builds on the advantages that technology introduces into relationships.

9

Field of CFT includes...

- A valuation of the benefits and drawbacks of one's technology use for individuals, couples and families within their lives and relationships
- Research into the topics related to technology that are the most relevant for couples and families
- Development and implementation of testing of assessment tools for identifying the presence of problematic Internet or technology usage
- Development and application of treatment models, frameworks, and strategies sensitive to individuals, couples, and families with a digital presence
- Incorporation of technology-based strategies to augment therapeutic goals and practices

10

Theoretical Origins of CFT

- Communication theories
 - Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984)
 - Hyperpersonal CMC (Rabby & Walther, 2002)
- Social Theories
 - Social Penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973)
 - Social Presence (Short, Christie, & Williams, 1993)
- Developmental Theories
 - Developmental model (Watt & White (1999)
 - Domestication theory (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992)

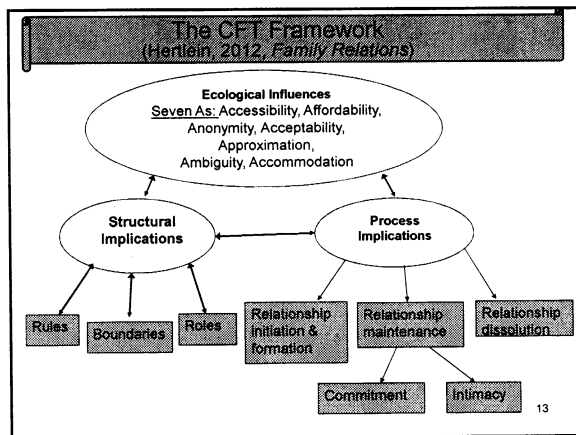
11



Hertlein's Multitheoretical Model for Conceptualizing Couple - Family-Technology Interface

(a.k.a. *the Couple and Family Technology Framework*)

12



Element 1: Ecological Influences (the Seven As)

14

Seven As

- Acceptability
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Anonymity
- Approximation
- Accommodation
- Ambiguity

15

Element 2: Implications to the Structure of Relationships

16

Implications for Roles

- Roles, or how we expect people to behave in given situations, also have to be renegotiated in the context of technology and new media
- Internet and new media help couples to achieve more equitable role balance and within-couple role congruence in their lives.
- In other ways, the computer and new media have a confusing and detrimental effect on roles.

17

Implications for 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)
- Although many participants indicated that the rules for communicating via cell phone were not necessary within their relationships, other participants reported conflict regarding cell phone usage in their relationships

18

Boundaries

- Boundaries about sharing information with outsiders that were well-established in the relationship previously may change with multiple channels to share information (Ward, 2006).
- Internet users reported feeling “smothered” by their partners (Henline & Harris, 2006).
- Other research has focused on how the blurred boundaries between work and home interfere with couple and family functioning (Campbell & Ling, 2009).

19

Element 3: Implications for the Process of Relationships

20

Relationship Initiation and Formation

- A majority of couples are meeting online (Dutton, Helsper, Whitty, Buckwalter, & Lee, 2008).
- Lack of “gating features” (McKenna, 2008)
- Internet users may believe they have higher degree of control over their interactions online than those not in computer-mediated relationships (McKenna, 2008)

21

Relationship 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).

22

Relationship Maintenance: Intimacy

- 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).

23

Relationship Maintenance: Commitment

- 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).

24

Relationship 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

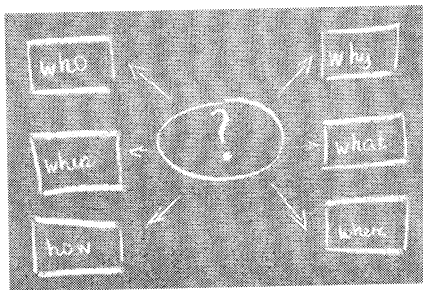
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Advantages of CFT Treatment Framework

1. Rather than being a specific theory, it instead serves as an overarching framework through which to view cases involving the Internet in some capacity.
2. Sensitive to issues of diversity and idiosyncratic characteristics of a couple's relationship
3. Can be tailored to specific presenting problems

26

Questions?



27

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