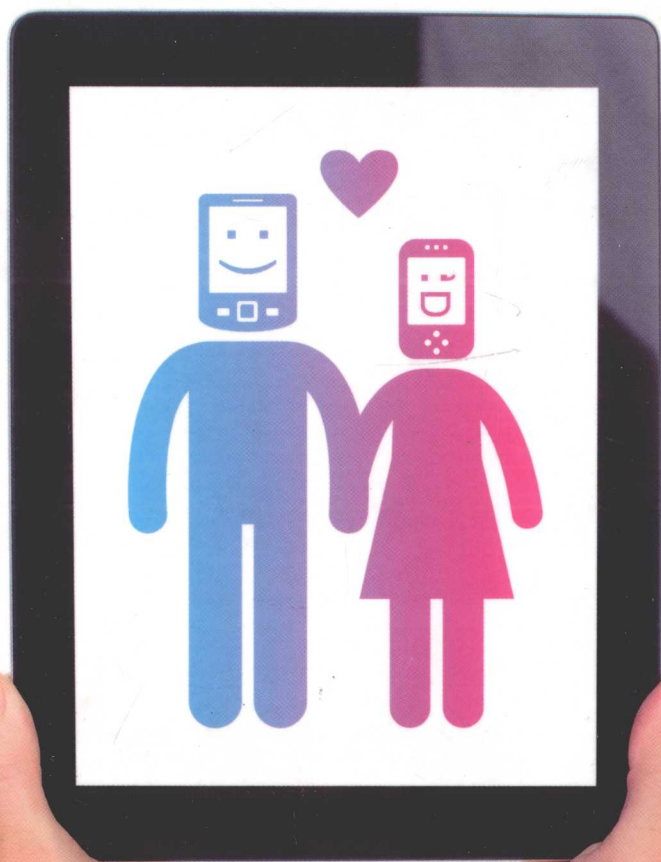


# THE COUPLE AND FAMILY TECHNOLOGY FRAMEWORK

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN A DIGITAL AGE



KATHERINE  
M. HERTLEIN  
& MARKIE  
L. C. BLUMER

ROUTLEDGE



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Katherine M. Hertlein and  
Markie L. C. Blumer



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# The Couple and Family Technology Framework

Couples and families worldwide have a constant electronic connection to others, a fact that is influencing the concerns and issues they bring to therapy. The authors of this resource help mental health practitioners to better deal with concerns such as online infidelity, online dating, Internet addictions, cyberbullying, and many more by introducing the **Couple and Family Technology (CFT) framework**, a multitheoretical approach that doesn't require clinicians to change their preferred clinical approaches.

The CFT framework acknowledges the ways in which couples navigate their relationships with technology and a partner simultaneously, and it attends to, and in some cases incorporates, the role of technology in therapeutic ways. Included in the authors' discussion of how different technologies affect relationships is

- a survey of what individuals' motivations of usage are;
- an examination of the specific issues that emerge in treatment;
- a study of the risks particularly relevant to intimate relationships;
- an introduction of the first-ever technology-based genogram.

They also examine technological usage across different developmental points in a couple's life span, with attention given throughout to people from various cultural backgrounds. Along with the CFT framework, the authors also introduce a new discipline of family research: Couple and Family Technology. This discipline integrates three broad perspectives in family science and helps therapists maintain a systemic focus in assessing and treating couples where issues of the Internet and new media are problematic. Online resources can be accessed by purchasers of the book and include videos, additional case studies, a glossary, and forms.

**Katherine M. Hertlein, PhD**, is an associate professor and program director of the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

**Markie L. C. Blumer, PhD**, is an assistant professor and the Delta Kappa (International Marriage and Family Therapy Honor Society) Zeta chapter faculty advisor in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

To my son Adam Joseph—you are my inspiration

—Katherine M. Hertlein

To all my relations, now and forever, I love and thank you

—Markie L. C. Blumer

## About the Authors

**Katherine M. Hertlein, PhD**, is an associate professor and program director of the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She received her master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Purdue University Calumet and her doctorate in human development, with a specialization in marriage and family therapy, from Virginia Tech. Across her academic career, she has published more than 40 articles, 5 books, and more than 25 book chapters. She has coedited a book on interventions in couples treatment, on interventions for clients with health concerns, and on infidelity treatment. She also serves on the editorial boards of several journals, including *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, and *Journal of Communication Technology and Human Behavior*. Recently, Dr. Hertlein published *Systemic Sex Therapy* and *A Clinician's Guide to Systemic Sex Therapy*. These two books are used in over 20 couple and family therapy training programs around the United States. In 2009, *Systemic Sex Therapy* was nominated for a Professional Health Book Award through the Society for Sex Therapy and Research (SSTAR). Dr. Hertlein has also produced the first multitheoretical model detailing the role of technology in couple and family life. She presents nationally and internationally on sex, technology, and couples. Dr. Hertlein has won numerous awards for her teaching and research. She is featured weekly as a guest on "Davenport After Dark," a radio program broadcast out of Dublin, Ireland, and currently maintains a private practice in Las Vegas.

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25 articles and 5 book chapters and has presented 75 times at various local, regional, national, and international conferences. She also serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy: An International Forum* and *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*. Across her academic career, Dr. Blumer has won numerous awards for her teaching and research. Most recently, she was a corecipient of a 2012 National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Education and Enrichment Section Outstanding Paper Award for her coauthored work “Are We Queer Yet? Training Away the Anti-gay.” She was also the lead recipient of a 2011 NCFR Family Therapy Section Best Research Paper Award for her first-authored work “Reflections on Becoming Feminist Therapists: A Model of Intergenerational Feminist Mentoring.”

# Preface

## Purpose of the Book

The field of Couple and Family Technology (CFT), as identified by Katherine M. Hertlein, encompasses both family and couple relationships in a broad sense. The primary purpose of this book is to focus on two specific aspects of CFT. First, we articulate the ways in which couples navigate their relationships with technology and their relationships with a partner simultaneously. This includes a discussion of the motivations of usage of specific technologies and social media, an exploration of specific issues that emerge in these treatments, and a presentation of particular risks relevant to intimate relationships. Second, we present a treatment approach informed by CFT that attends to and, in some cases, incorporates the role of technology in therapeutic ways. This is accomplished through discussion of technological usage across different developmental points in a couple's life span, with attention given throughout to people from various cultural backgrounds, and via a discussion of the CFT framework.

A portion of this book is also devoted to the application of the CFT framework. Because it is multitheoretical, the introduction of the CFT framework does not imply that clinicians need to change their preferred clinical approaches; instead, it serves as an invitation to find ways to incorporate such a framework into current practice. We believe this is a more inclusive approach to working with couples and families, particularly around technology-related issues. Clinicians will find information that will help them address the following kinds of common concerns:

- Internet or online infidelity
- online pornography-related issues
- online dating
- Internet-related dissolutions
- everyday usage of technology and new media
- online video gaming
- cybersex
- Internet addictions



- cyberbullying
- cyberstalking
- electronic intimate partner violence.

Put simply, our book is about the way that different technologies affect relationships in different ways and the way that relationships affect the use of different technologies. It presents the state of the interdisciplinary research and scholarly thoughts on how new media is integrated into couples' lives and introduces a new discipline of family research called Couple and Family Technology. It also walks readers through how to apply the CFT framework to couples in treatment and assists readers in recognizing risks and concerns related to technology and new media.

It is important to note that this book, while it contains some information regarding online dating, dating in and of itself is not the focus. In part, this is because there are a number of high-quality texts already on the market with this dedicated focus. There are actually quite a few books with a focus on online dating. Diane M. Berry's *Romancing the Web: A Therapist's Guide to the Finer Points of Online Dating* focuses on online dating with the primary reading audience being clinicians, and Tamsen Butler's *Meeting Your Match Online: The Complete Guide to Internet Dating and Dating Services—including True Life Date Stories* focuses on individuals seeking partners online. In Regina Lynn's *The Sexual Revolution 2.0: Getting Connected, Upgrading Your Sex Life, and Finding True Love—or at Least a Dinner Date—in the Internet Age*, sex and technology are the focus. Instead of focusing on more of the how-to of online dating, this book attends to how couples communicate with one another, including their initiations, but within the context of technology and new media.

As younger-age cohorts' involvement with technology has certainly received more media attention over the years, the primary goals of such texts is to assist parents in protecting their children and teaching them to interact with new media responsibly, such as Larry Rosen does in *Me, MySpace, and I: Parenting the Net Generation* and Candice Kelsey does in *Generation MySpace: Helping Your Teen Survive Online Adolescence*. Another related book, *Life and Death on the Internet: How to Protect Your Family on the World Wide Web*, edited by Keith Schroeder and Julie Ledger, attends to some of the more serious online threats toward children and toward families in general. Our text is different in that we discuss the topics related to parents and children within the context of couple development.

This book is also not focused on Internet or online infidelity or on cyberaddictions, although both are given some attention to varying degrees. Several recent books have been released that focus on Internet addictions, such as Kimberly Young and Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu's

edited volume *Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment*, whose primary audience is clinicians. Two other popular texts include one focused on online gaming–related addiction, *Cyber Junkie: Escape the Gaming and Internet Trap*, by Kevin Roberts, and *Infidelity and the Internet: Virtual Relationships and Real Betrayal*, by Marlene Maheu and Rona Subotnik. We instead focus on how to understand these issues through the lens of the field of CFT.

## Outline of Chapters

The first few chapters of the book provide general information with regard to technology and practices. In Chapter 1, “Couple and Family Technology: The Emergence of a New Discipline,” we review the presence technology and new media have in our lives. In so doing, we provide a context for understanding the experiences of couples in today’s society with regard to technology and new media. In Chapter 2, “The Basics of Online Coupling,” we provide information about the characteristics of online communication as compared to face-to-face communication. We also review personality characteristics and motivations of those engaging in electronically based communication as well as different types of online relationships. The next chapter, titled “Issues E-merging in Couple Life,” highlights the key issues related to technology that may emerge in couple and family treatment, namely, online infidelity, sex addiction, and online video gaming. We also address some of the larger areas that may be secondary issues related to these specific issues in new media, such as accountability, shared time and interests, gender and power, and suspicion and jealousy.

Following chapters, more specifically, focus on describing the CFT framework. Chapter 4, “The Couple and Family Technology Framework,” outlines the main components of the framework and how they reciprocally influence one another. A case example is provided as a way to assist the reader in applying the framework. The next chapter, “Ecological Influences on the Couple System,” provides a detailed description of the manner in which each of the qualities germane to the Internet affects a couple’s satisfaction, structure, and processes. This discussion leads into Chapter 6, “The Interactional Nature of Structure and Function.” The purpose of this chapter is to review how the structure of relationships as well as technology affect relational functioning. This chapter is followed by Chapter 7, “Assessment in the CFT Framework.” This chapter provides a summary of popular assessments used to evaluate and/or diagnose Internet-related problems. It also presents the first-ever technology-based genogram as developed by Markie L. C. Blumer, complete with a supplemental series of questions contained within the appendices. “Treatment of Internet-Based Problems Through the CFT Framework” (Chapter 8) outlines ways in which the CFT framework can be used as a guide to

treating problems in couples related to technology, with specific attention to the ecological elements, structure, and process.

The final set of chapters attend to the broader context in which couples are embedded. Chapter 9, “Electronically-Mediated Communication Across a Couple’s Developmental Lifespan,” focuses on how couples and technology evolve together over the life span. Some of these specific areas include couple initiation facilitated by electronic means, the use of technology in a couple’s life as they raise children, and discussion of relationship termination in a digital age. In addition, technology usage in relationships does not come without risk. Therefore, we devote Chapter 10 to exploring the impact of cyberbullying, cyberstalking, and technology-facilitated violence in couple relationships. We close with Chapter 11, which focuses on the state of the field of CFT now and in the future, with implications for research, training, and practice.

## Key Terms

Throughout the course of this text, we will be using the terms *technology* and *new media*. For our purposes, *technology* is defined as the application of innovations specifically within the fields of communication and electronics. *New media* is a term encompassing a broad range of technologies that enable electronic communication. These include objects such as smartphones and tablets, websites such as Facebook and other social networking sites, and forms of art and entertainment such as video games and electronic art.

Literature in the fields of information systems as well as the social sciences use the acronym CMC to stand for “computer-mediated communication.” While this originated at a time when cellular technologies were not advanced enough to communicate via text or similar messaging, it is clear people are using the Internet to communicate on more mechanisms than a computer. In the field of CFT, we introduce the term *electronic-based communications* (EBC) to refer to the wide variety of communications that occur as web-based (including text messaging), in addition to the types of communication facilitated by personal computers.

## A Note on Timeliness

We also acknowledge that this book, as timely as it may be to the field at its publication, may contain statistics and figures regarding computer usage that will be quickly outdated. Therefore, we want to assert that while the statistics may be flexible, the concepts related to the CFT framework and information about family and couple dynamics affected by technology will remain quite stable. We provide examples describing how common experiences (e.g., online dating, online endings, cyberthreats and risks, cybersex, Internet infidelity, parental concerns related to technology) operate

in couple relationships in the context of technology. Also explored in this book are the unique challenges that technology introduces into couple's lives as well as strategies for managing such issues. Our book is primarily aimed at assisting mental health care professionals working with couples, though we believe people interested in enhancing their relationships in an ever-growing digital age will find benefit in its pages.

We sincerely hope that clinicians, academics, and students alike will find this book descriptive enough to be useful but flexible enough to be adapted to various couple types and, eventually, to families. As technology and new media continue to evolve, we anticipate and embrace further exchanges of ideas about this book and these topics for years to come.

Katherine M. Hertlein  
Markie L. C. Blumer

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And finally, to my immediate and extended family: every one of you has demonstrated nothing but support and love toward my career, and I appreciate that you listened to me talk about this book for the better part of a year intently and with interest. To my mom—thank you for reading everything I’ve ever written and listening to every radio show and interview I have done. I so much appreciate it. To my dad—I’m sorry there aren’t any pictures. Maybe you could draw some in the margins or wait for the movie. Thank you for all of the intellectual exchanges, for use of your computer, for letting me follow you to the library, and for the support of my work. To all my sisters—I remember our first bit of technology, the Atari game console and a Prodigy computer! I’ll take on any one of you in a game of Kaboom! or Circus Atari anytime. To my sister Denise—I am grateful for the way you help me open my eyes in helpful and adaptive ways through presenting different, broader, and more useful perspectives, both about work and life. I am also hoping some of your intelligence, wit, and humor has rubbed off on me. To my sister Anne—you inspire me more than you can even know with your ability to take on the hardest of challenges with ease. To my sister Lynn—I appreciate your giving me a dose of perspective and showing me there is more to the world than work. And, of course, to my dear son Adam: I hope you know how many lessons are in this book for you—both for your future relationships but also to see you can do anything you want if you set your mind to it. I hope you learn from my example to be strong, driven, and compassionate to others. This book contains just over 96,000 words, and they are nowhere near enough to tell you how much you mean to me, how grateful I am to be a part of your life, and the amount of love I feel for you.

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