Social Connection ("*It's a People-Thing*.")

"In 1985, the General Social Survey (GSS) collected the first nationally representative data on the confidants with whom Americans discuss important matters. In the 2004 GSS the authors replicated those questions to assess social change in core network structures. Discussion networks were smaller in 2004 than in 1985. **The number of people saying there is no one with whom they discuss important matters nearly tripled.** The mean network size decreases by about a third (one confidant), from 2.94 in 1985 to 2.08 in 2004. **The modal respondent now reports having no confidant; the modal respondent in 1985 had three confidants.** Both kin and non-kin confidants were lost in the past two decades, but the greater decrease of non-kin ties leads to more confidant networks centered on spouses and parents, with fewer contacts through voluntary associations and neighborhoods. Most people have densely interconnected confidants similar to them. Some changes reflect the changing demographics of the U.S. population. Educational heterogeneity of social ties has decreased, racial heterogeneity has increased. The data may overestimate the number of social isolates, but these shrinking networks reflect an important social change in America." (McPherson, 2006)

Social Networking as a <u>Symptom</u> of Problematic Internet Use (PIU)

People with Problematic Internet Use (PIU) were more likely than others to go online to meet new people, talk to others with similar interests, seek emotional support, and use interpersonal functions such as chat rooms, forums, and interactive games. (Morahan-Martin, 2000, 2003)

> *"Social aspects of Internet use consistently differentiated those with more Internet use problems from others. Pathological users were more likely to use the Internet for meeting new people, emotional support, talking to others sharing the same interests, and playing socially interactive games. . . [Pathological users] are friendlier, more open, and more themselves and they report it is easier to make friends when online. They're more fun with people online than non-pathological users and are more likely to share intimate secrets online as well. . . For them, the Internet can be socially liberating, the Prozac of social communication."* (Morahan-Martin and Schumacher, 2000, p 26)

Excessive and compulsive Internet use were both significant predictors of negative outcomes associated with Internet use; however, *"excessive use was one of the weakest predictors of negative outcomes, whereas preference for online social interaction, compulsive use, and [cognitive preoccupation] were among the strongest."* (Caplan, 2003, pages 637 – 638)

A more recent study found, *"For those participants who use the Internet to communicate with family and friends, heavy usage had little negative implications for PIU. In contrast, those who used the net to make new friends were much more likely to have high PIU scores."* (Kim and Davis, 2009, page 496)

Those <u>with</u> PIU . . .

- Spend most of their time online using interpersonal communication applications. Nondependent Internet users spend most of their time using e-mail and surfing websites. (Young, 1996)
- Are 26% more likely to go online in order to meet new people. (Scherer, 1997)
- Prefer online social interaction over face-to-face social interaction (Caplan, 2003; Davis, 2001; Morahan-Martin and Schumacher, 2000)
- Are more likely to use the Internet for interpersonal activities and to go online to meet people, form relationships and seek emotional support. (Morahan-Martin, 2007)

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) and Social Deficits

Compared to face-to-face context, computer mediated interpersonal communication affords greater anonymity, more time creating and editing verbal messages, and more control over self-presentation and impression management. (Walther, 1996)

Problematic Internet use is associated with social skill deficiency, loneliness, and social anxiety (Caplan, 2005, 2007; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000, 2003).

"In the case of introverted or socially anxious individuals, Internet use may serve as a way to avoid being alone and may intensify disconnection from face-to-face relationships" and that *"introverted individuals using Internet communication as a substitute for face-to-face relationships seem unlikely to succeed in getting their interpersonal needs met"* (Erwin, 2004, p. 631).

"In general, Internet addicts have difficulty forming intimate relationships with others and hide behind the anonymity of cyberspace to connect with others in a nonthreatening way. Through the exchange of online messages, users compensate for what they may lack in real life." (Caplan & High, 2007)

Social anxiety is associated with preferred online social interaction. *"Those who are chronically lonely and those who are socially anxious share many characteristics which predispose them to develop IA [Internet addiction]. Both are apprehensive in approaching others, fearing negative evaluations and rejection. They tend to be preoccupied with their perceived social deficiencies, which leads them to be inhibited, reticent, and withdrawn in interpersonal situations and avoid social interactions."* (Morahan-Martin, 2008, pages 5253)

Those <u>with</u> PIU . . .

- Are more social isolated and depressed. (Krant, 1997)
- Lonely. (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Caplan, 2002; Morahan-Martin & Schumacker, 2003) Self-reported levels of loneliness predicted preference for online social interaction and experiencing negative outcomes. (Caplan, 2003)
- Socially anxious (Caplan, 2007). Individuals with social anxiety disorder experience greater comfort interacting on the Internet than face-to-face. (Erwin at all, 2004)
- Have lower self-presentational skills (Caplan, 2005)
- Use the Internet for mood regulation (Caplan, 2003, 2005, 2010)
- Have a cognitive preoccupation with the online world (Davis et al., 2002).

Adolescents

- Adolescents have the tendency not to distinguish between themselves and their avatars (Blinka, 2008). They pay less attention to differences between themselves and their game avatars, and consider success in the game their personal success. Adolescent players consider their avatars as an idealized, superior form of themselves. Individuals with lower self-esteem find MMORPGs very attractive – they provide a quick form of relief from the uncomfortable feelings of low self-esteem.
- There is a negative relationship between using social network sites and self-esteem. Frequent use of social networking was indirectly associated with adolescents' self-esteem and overall well-being. Negative feedback from social sites predicted lower self-esteem and well-being whereas positive feedback predicted healthier outcomes. (Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten, 2006)
- Highly troubled adolescents are more likely to form close online relationships than those of healthy familial relationships (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003)

- Adolescents with traits of schizotypal personality disorder reported significantly less social interaction with real life friends who use the Internet for social interaction significantly more frequently than the control group. Severity of SPD and depressive symptoms were positively correlated with the amount of time people spend in chat rooms and on Internet gaming. The study also found a negative correlation between participants use of real-life friends and time spent in Internet chat. (Mittal, Tessner, and Walker, 2007)
- A national survey of adolescents found those who reported depressive symptoms were more likely than their nondepressed counterparts to talk to strangers online, use the Internet more frequently for interpersonal communication, and be more self disclosing online (Ybarra, Alexander, and Mitchell, 2005).
- Instant messaging use among adolescents predicted increased depression but lower loneliness six months later. (van den Eijnden et al., 2008)