

ROUNDTABLE PROPOSAL

**Mediating Intimacy: Navigating friendships, family ties,
and romantic relationships with communication technologies**

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Social relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners provide structure and meaning in our lives. We continually gather information through interpersonal interaction, which influences our motivations and social behaviors. With the widespread adoption of technologies that mediate interpersonal communication, many of these long-standing practices are being reconfigured. Many mediated social practices have no analogue in face-to-face interaction; others violate norms and expectations in subtle ways, such that our social intuitions, honed offline, may lead us astray.

Despite the adaptations that mediating technologies such as mobile phones, email, and text messaging require, our goals in interpersonal interaction remain the same: identifying and connecting with potential friends and romantic partners, maintaining existing close relationships, and sometimes dissolving those relationships when they sour. Different mediating technologies both constrain and facilitate these processes to different degrees. Online dating systems, for example, facilitate finding a romantic partner by providing detailed information about dozens or hundreds of potential mates; however, nuances of personality and behavior are difficult to discern within the constraints of asynchronous, text-based messaging that many systems provide. Similarly, text messages on a mobile phone facilitate quick, non-intrusive coordination and signaling of presence, but they are too short and the typical input method too cumbersome for in-depth discussions (though the teenage text-messaging patois works to alleviate this).

We propose a roundtable discussion of current theoretical and empirical work as well as future research directions relating to the management of intimate relationships through mediating technologies. The discussion will be open to all conference attendees, and furthermore we will try to identify interested faculty and students ahead of time. Several graduate student researchers at the UC-Berkeley iSchool (including those who collaborated to write this proposal) have already expressed interest in participating in this roundtable session.

We would like to explore the following topics in the discussion:

- How do people take advantage of mediating technologies to foster intimacy in new ways? In situations not traditionally structured for intimacy?
- How do people circumvent the constraints of these technologies to recover some of the intimacy they feel face-to-face?

Roundtable Proposal: Mediating Intimacy

- How do mediating technologies change the nature of public and private space and time among intimate friends, partners, or family?
- How might we design communication technologies that better support the formation and development of intimacy?
- Given the possibility of continuous contact by technological means, how do individuals negotiate for and create space apart from their intimate others? How do people manage the expectations and obligations that come with constant availability?