

The Online Medium

Characteristics, opportunities and limitations

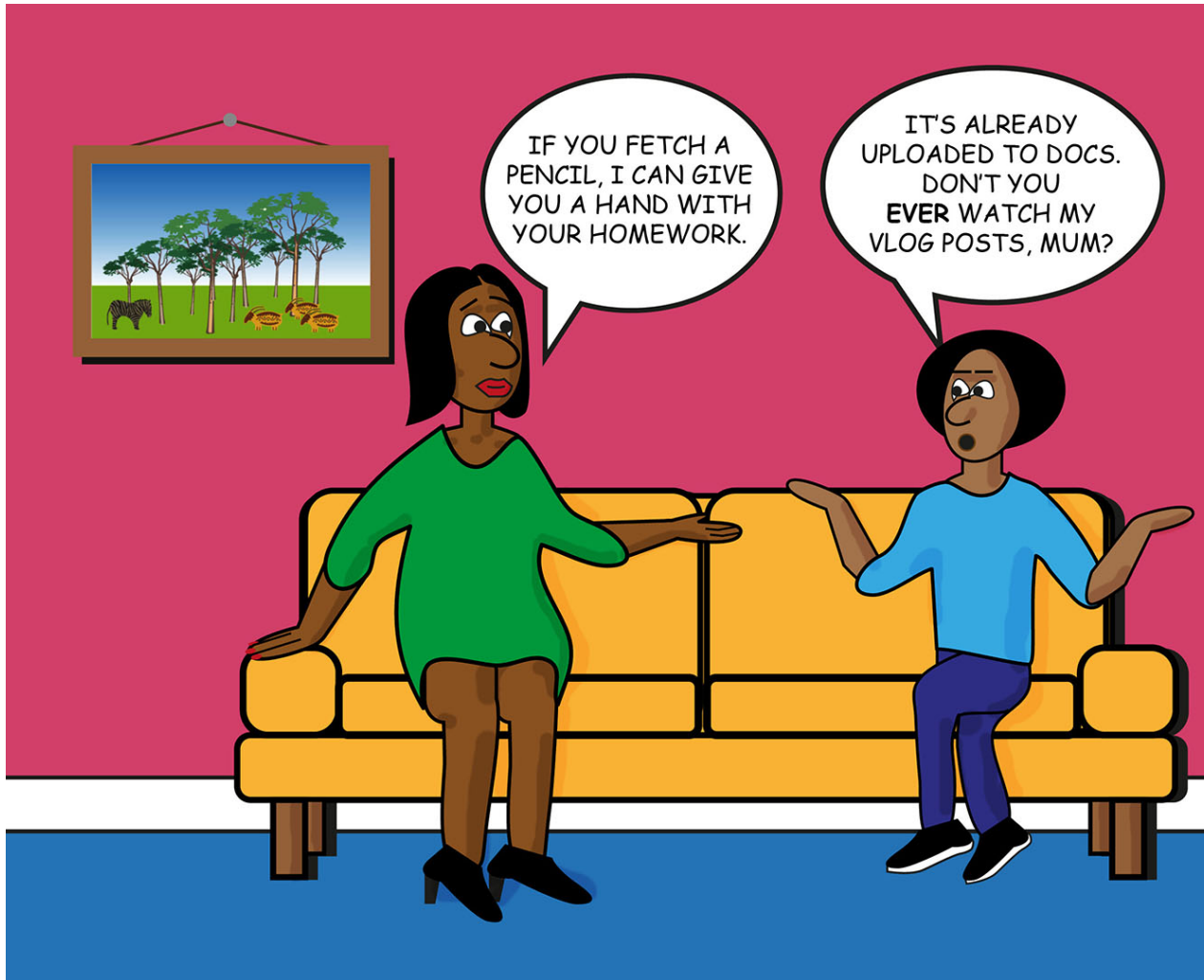
Pierre Cachia

Couple Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

The photos in this presentation are posed by models for illustrative purposes only.

E-Therapy,
online counselling,
cybercounseling,
cybertherapy,
Internet counselling,
e-mail therapy or
Web counselling?

Digital Native or Digital Immigrant?



Digital Immigrant Accents

‘...include printing out your email... needing to print out a document written on the computer in order to edit it (rather than just editing on the screen); and bringing people physically into your office to see an interesting web site (rather than just sending them the URL)... the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language’.

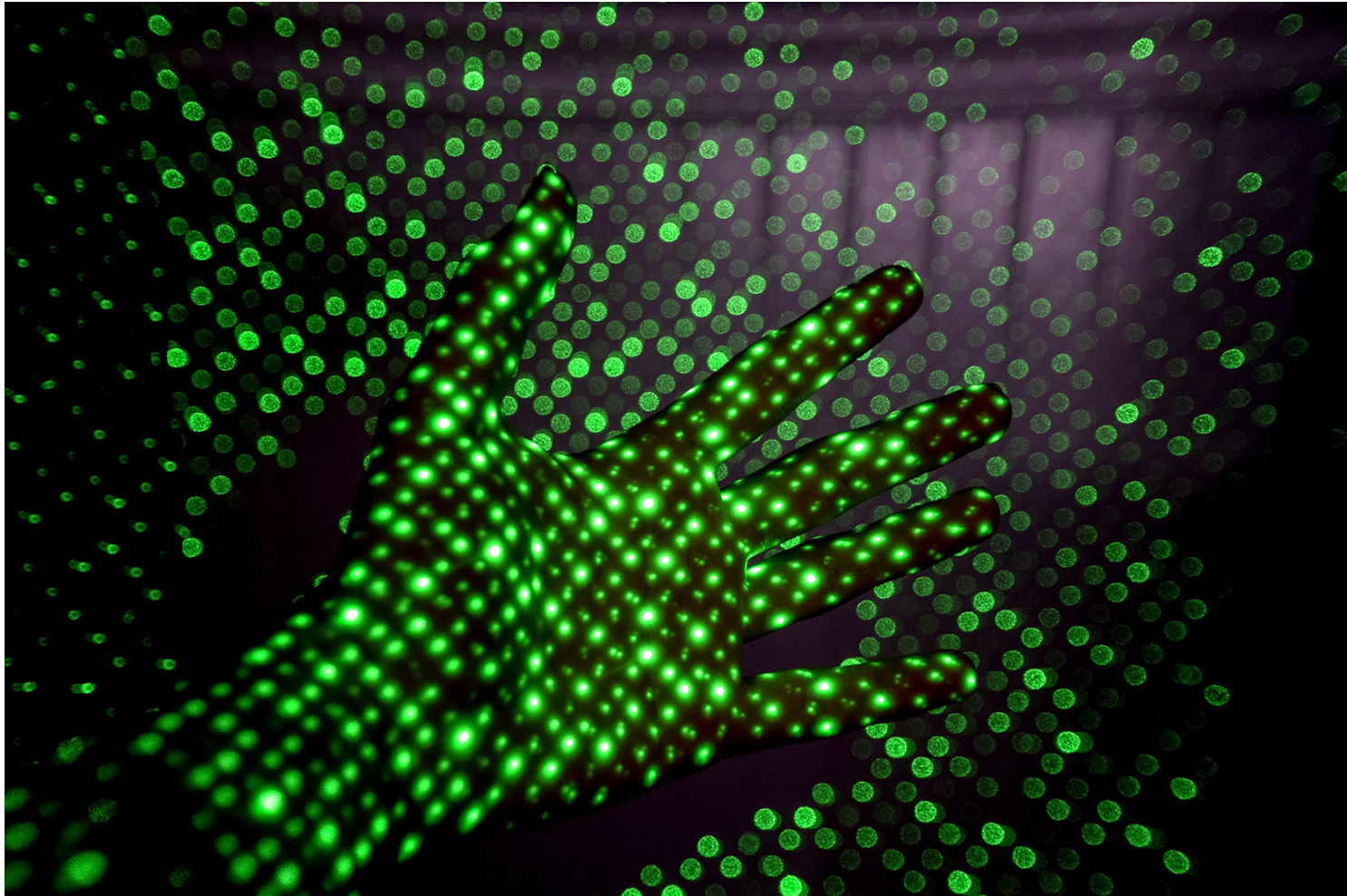
M. Prensky (2001)

Cyberspace as a network of minds

‘The basic premise of Cyberpsychology Architecture is that cyberspace is psychological space, a projection of the individual and collective human mind. Both consciously and unconsciously we perceive this realm on the other side of our screen portals as an extension of our psyches. Early psychoanalytic studies identified how this online world entails a blurring of the boundary between mind space and machine space’.

J. Suler (2017)

International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies



Cyberspace as a network of minds

‘Mediated by computers, we experience ourselves as existing within an intermediate zone between self and other. From the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, this space can be conceptualized as an intersubjective or interpersonal field, a transitional or transformational space, a territory that is part me, part other, and that provides a venue for self expression, interpersonal discovery, play, creativity, and, unfortunately, the acting out of psychopathology’.

John Suler (2017)

International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies

The Online Disinhibition Effect

‘The online disinhibition effect is a term used to describe the lowering of psychological restraints, which often serve to regulate behaviors in the online social environment ... It is reflected in reduced behavioral inhibitions, a lowered regard for behavioral boundaries while in cyberspace, and can be expressed in various online interpersonal behaviors which can be positive or negative’.

Lapidot-Lefler, N., & Barak, A. (2015)

Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace

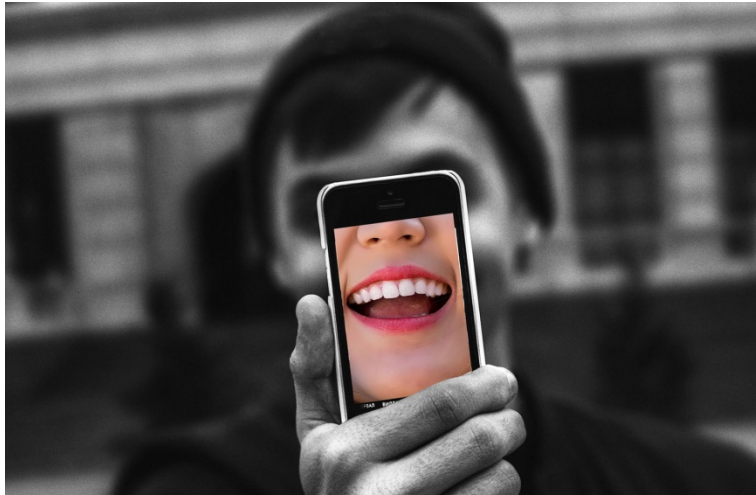
The Online Disinhibition Effect

- ▶ Dissociative anonymity – You don't know me
- ▶ Invisibility - You can't see me
- ▶ Asynchronicity – See you later!
- ▶ Dissociative imagination – It's just a game!
- ▶ Minimising Authority – We're Equals
- ▶ Solipsistic Introjections – We're in this together

▶ Suler, 2005

International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies

Disinhibition – Toxic or Benign



Benign Disinhibition

- ▶ The social effects of benign online disinhibition may be expressed in attempts to help others. Typically, people engaged in online activities are prepared to ask and offer each other assistance and advice in various subjects. Noticeable examples of online prosocial behaviors include participation in online support groups, counseling, volunteerism, philanthropy, provision of helpful information, and e-mentoring.

Lapidot-Lefler, N., & Barak, A. (2015)

Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace

Benign Disinhibition

In cases involving the need for urgent emotional support (e.g., individuals contemplating suicide), the effect of online disinhibition has the advantage of establishing interpersonal relationships more quickly than in offline environments and thus the process that leads to self-disclosure is accelerated.

(Barak & Suler, 2008; Suler, 2008)

The Online Disinhibition Effect

There is limited research evidence suggesting that the interaction between *anonymity* and *invisibility* and the interaction *between invisibility* and *eye contact* may influence the benign online disinhibition in terms of disclosure of emotions and first-person expressions.

Lapidot-Lefler, N., & Barak, A. (2015).

Positive Aspects of Cyberspace

- ▶ Temporal flexibility
- ▶ No limitations of space
- ▶ Social multiplicity
- ▶ Textual communication
- ▶ Recording ability
- ▶ Speed of exchanging info
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Unlimited info
- ▶ Empowerment
- ▶ Equality
- ▶ Diminution of the 'halo effect'

Maja Živko (2011)

Negative Aspects of Cyberspace

- ▶ Lack of sensory integration
- ▶ Absorption without filtering
- ▶ Frustration caused by tech difficulties
- ▶ Redefining identity
- ▶ Happiness belongs to others
- ▶ Cyberstalking
- ▶ Behavioural disinhibition
- ▶ Cyber-addiction



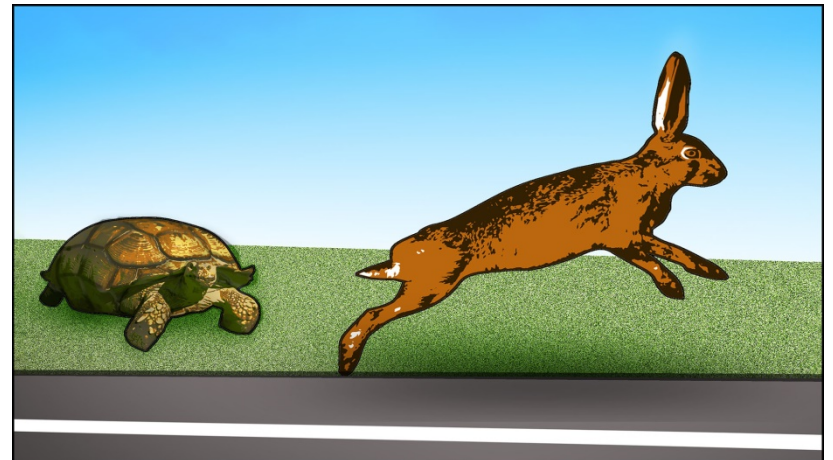
Maja Živko (2011)

Heading for a Cultural Clash?



Amazon, eBay, WhatsApp,
Facebook...

Psychological change
&
psychic development



The Good & Bad of eTherapy

- ▶ Convenience
- ▶ Addressing potential ruptures complicated by the reduced access to audio-visual cues (Snadahl & Lindgren, 2006)
- ▶ Technical difficulties affect rapport and perceived reliability (Anthony & Goss, 2003)
- ▶ Reduced emotional connection between patients and therapist (Lewis' et.al., 2003; Mallen, Day, and Gree,2003).
- ▶ Power imbalance is reduced (Owen, 1995).

Pierre Cachia CPsychol

Senior Psychoanalytic Couple Psychotherapist
Counselling Psychologist

pcachia@tavistockrelationships.org

April 2019