Digital Deception!

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND AVOID FINANCIAL AND RELATIONAL MANIPULATION
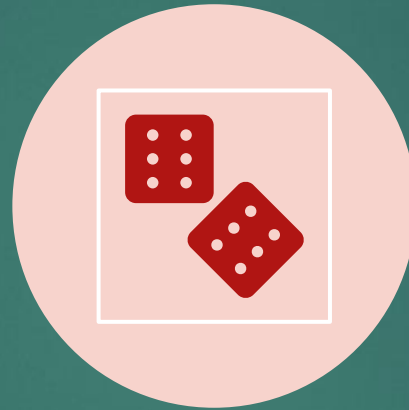
Eric J. Camden, PhD, LPC, NCC, ACS

Learning Objectives

BACKGROUND & ETIOLOGY

PREDICTORS (PERPETRATORS AND TARGETS)

EVALUATION & TESTIMONY CONSIDERATIONS

Background

Media

- Catfish, the Movie (and TV show)
- Untold: The Girlfriend Who Didn't Exist (Netflix)
- The Tinder Swindler (Netflix)
- Virginia Tech football player
- Emails from the Prince of [insert foreign nation]

Client

What is "Catfishing"?

▶ A person who sets up a false personal profile on a social networking site for fraudulent or deceptive purposes (Merriam-Webster)

▶ A person who has stolen the identity of another person and is using it as his/her own social media identity (Schulman et al, 2010)

▶ A person who creates a false online identity to pursue a romantic relationship (Timblin, 2019)

▶ A person who uses a false identity online to involve themselves in one or more romantic relationships

▶ Primary Themes: Financial gain and/or relationship attainment

▶ New Method: Intimate Manipulated Fraud Industrialization (IMFI)

Theoretical Considerations

- Attachment Theory
  - Rejection Sensitivity (Brown et al., 2010)

- Culture and Family Technology (CFT) Framework (Hertlein, 2012)
  - Ecological influences of relationship structure and process
  - Anonymity

- Evolutionary Psychology (Jonason et al., 2009)
  - Personality Traits are adaptive and naturally selected
  - Adaptive traits, which are common among a people group
  - Combined with Personality Psychology, used to describe individual differences
  - Traits are developed to compete with others to survive in their environment

Etiology

- Attachment Theory
  - Rejection Sensitivity (Brown et al., 2010)

- Catfishing may be used to exploit, trick, and/or take advantage of someone (Lauder & March, 2023)
  - Financial Gains (Lauckner et al., 2019)

- May be rooted in Online Disinhibition Effect (Shuler, 2004)
  - Since it is online, there is less connection to morals, leads to less inhibition.

Etiology – Continued

- 4 Characteristics of Online Violence (Donath, 2008)
  - Trolling – upsetting and causing online conflict
  - Category Deception – take on a different social role
  - Impersonation – the act of pretending to be someone else
  - Identity Concealment – misrepresent part/who part of self.
- Catfishing may be originated from: (Paat & Markham, 2021)
  - Boredom, loneliness, insecurity, revenge, or financial exploitation; hx of cyberbullying
- May be explored through the "Dark Tetrad" traits (Lauder & March, 2023)
- There are growing calls for legislation and policy to mitigate (Mosley et al, 2020)
- Individuals aged 50 and older is the fastest growing demographic using online dating sites (Mcwilliams & Barrett, 2014)

Theoretical Consideration – Dark Tetrad

▶ Dark Tetrad – It is important to assess and consider the functionality of these symptoms

  ▶ May be a functional approach for the perpetrator – mitigates low self-esteem (Lauder & March, 2023)

  ▶ Psychopathy – lack of remorse from a blatant disregard of social norms (Lauder & March, 2023)

  ▶ More likely to target people they know to observe effects of cyberbullying

  ▶ Machiavellianism – people who denote cunningness and deception to be liked and socially accepted

  ▶ Fear social rejection

  ▶ More likely to be men

  ▶ Statistically significantly indicated in cyberbullying (Kircaburun, et al., 2019)

  ▶ Narcissism – individual's self-absorption, superiority, authority, and exploitative(meaning they will exploit   others for their own gain) (Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI))

  ▶ more likely to be women when related to cyberbullying

  ▶ Sadism – enjoyment from causing psychological or physical pain (Lauder & March, 2023)

Demographic Characteristic	Perpetrators (16%)	Targets (84%)
Sex		
Man	26%	15%
Woman	74%	85%
Mean age in years	24.28 (SD 6.09)	24.69 (SD 7.68)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latin	43%	54%
European/White	24%	26%
African American/Black	14%	8%
Native American	10%	6%
Asian American	7%	5%
Middle Eastern	2%	1%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	78%	89%
Bisexual	11%	5%
Gay/Lesbian	8%	4%
Other	3%	2%
Education		
Highschool/GED	15%	13%
1–3 years college	64%	72%
Bachelor's degree	17%	13%
Graduate degree	5%	2%
Employment status		
Unemployed	13%	9%
Student	58%	61%
Part time	10%	15%
Full time	19%	15%
Religiosity		
Not at all	10%	12%
Slightly	40%	50%
Moderately	24%	22%
Extremely	25%	16%
Have children		
Yes	15%	20%
No	85%	80%
Residence during catfish relationship		
Urban/City	44%	44%
Rural	18%	16%
Suburban	38%	40%
Mean catfish relationships	1.82 (SD 1.23)	1.19 (SD .55)
Mean relationship length in months	9.88 (SD 14.68)	8.63 (SD 15.37)

Results (Campbell & Parker, 2022)

Theme	Percent of Sample
Emulating an ideal self	37%
Enhancing mate value	16%
Rationale unknown	15%
Entertainment	8%
Testing fidelity of significant other	8%
Anonymity assurance	7%
Similar/same physical self but dissimilar intrinsic qualities	4%
Testing a different gender, personality, or sexual orientation	4%
Tailoring identity to target's preferences	1%

Predictors/Risk Factors: The perpetrator

More likely male (Mosley et al, 2020)
- 23 percent of women
- 36 percent of males

Higher attachment anxiety and avoidance (Mosley et al., 2020)
- Avoidance was reduced when controlling for anxiety

Negative view of self (Mosley et al., 2020)
- want to portray a better version of self (i.e., impression management, increased mate value)

Low self-acceptance (Sechi, 2023; Mosley 2020)
- Used to increase attention and acceptance from others
- Men – increase their view of their assets, relationship goals, interests, and personality traits
- Women – increase the positive view of physical attributes

Predictors/Risk Factors:
The perpetrator

May exhibit "Dark Tetrad" Traits (Lauder & March, 2023)

Motivation (Lauder & March, 2023)

- Men – often self-serving
- Women – desire to be wanted/desired

Low Mate value – do not feel others view them as a potential mate

Relationship Experiences (Timblin, 2019)

Perpetrator

▶ Nervous and scared while excited and mysterious

▶ Initiate contact due to attractiveness, thrill seeking, desperation/boredom

Target

▶ Nervous, interested, and excited

▶ Involvement due to attractiveness, perceived shared interest, and likeable personality

▶ Perceived the connection as authentic/genuine

Relationship Characteristics

PERPETRATORS REPORT SIGNIFICANTLY MORE PASSIONATE LOVE THAN TARGETS

PERPETRATORS REPORT SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER SATISFACTION (BOTH LOWER THAN FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONSHIPS)

MAJORITY OF COMMUNICATION OCCURS THROUGH TYPED MESSAGES RATHER THAN VIDEO

TARGETS REPORT GREATER SELF-DISCLOSURE

Predictors/Risk Factors: The Target

More often women (Mosley et al., 2020)

May have difficulty with attachment, particularly anxious or avoidant attachment patterns (Mosley et al., 2020)

Often are youth (Paat & Markham, 2021).

May have increased mental health (Lauder & March, 2023)
- This may be present before and/or after the event
- Depression, anxiety, paranoia, embarrassment, anger, fear

Legal Considerations

- Disclaimer: I am not an attorney

- Although not "illegal", Catfishing can lead to illegal acts
  - Child pornography
  - Cyberbullying
  - From misdemeanors to felonies

- Virginia Code: Code of Virginia Code - Article 7.1. Computer Crimes

- **§ 18.2-152.3. Computer fraud; penalty.** Any person who uses a computer or computer network, without authority and:

- 1. Obtains property or services by false pretenses;

- 2. Embezzles or commits larceny; or

- 3. Converts the property of another;

- is guilty of the crime of computer fraud.

Legal Considerations, Continued

▶ **§ 18.2-152.5:1. Using a computer to gather identifying information; penalties.**A. It is unlawful for any person, other than a law-enforcement officer, as defined in § 9.1-101, and acting in the performance of his official duties, to use a computer to obtain, access, or record, through the use of material artifice, trickery or deception, any identifying information, as defined in clauses (iii) through (xiii) of subsection C of § 18.2-186.3. Any person who violates this section is guilty of a Class 6 felony

▶ **§ 18.2-152.7:2. Using computer to commit a scheme involving false representations; penalty.** Any person who, without the intent to receive any direct or indirect benefit, maliciously sends an electronically transmitted communication containing a false representation intended to cause another person to spend money, and such false representation causes such person to spend money, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor

Identifying and Avoiding Digital/Online Deception

- If in treatment, thorough psychological assessment
  - Proactive alleviation of depressive/anxious symptoms
  - Mental health, justice oriented, or both
- Educating people about risk factors associated with susceptibility to deception
- Do not give money to people you've never met in person
- Know warning signs:
  - Grooming
  - Last-minute changes
  - Convey Intense emotions

Thoughts or Questions?

References

Campbell, K. & Parker, M. L. (2022). Catfish: Exploring the individual predictors and interpersonal characteristics of deceptive online romantic relationships. Contemporary Family https://doiu.org/10.1007/s10591-022-09646-5 Therapy

Donath, J. (1998). Identity and deception in virtual community. In M. Smith & P. Kollock (Eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Jonason, P.R., Li, N.P., Webster, G.D., and Schmitt, D.P. (2009). The dark triad: Facilitating a short-term mating strategy in men. *European Journal of Personality, 23*(1), 5-18. https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/per.698.

Lauckner, C., Truszczynski, N., Lambert, D., Kottamasu, D.L., Meherally, S., Schipani-McLaughlin, A.M., Taylor, E., Hansen, N. (2019). "Catfishing," cyberbullying, and coercion: AN exploration of the risks associated with dating app used among rural sexual minority male. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 23*(3), 298-306. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2019.1587729.

Lauder, C. & March, E. (2023). Catching the catfish: Exploring gender and the dark tetrad of personality as predictors of catfish perpetration. *Computers in Human Behavior, 140,* 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107599.

McWilliams, S., & Barrett, A. E. (2014). Online dating in middle and later life: Gendered expectations and experiences. *Journal of Family Issues, 35(3),* 411-436.

Mosley, M.A., Lancaster, M., Parker, M.L., Campbell, K. (2020). Adult attachment and online dating deception: A theory modernized. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 35*(2), 227-243. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2020.1714577.

Paat, Y. & Markham, C. (2021). Digital crime, trauma, and abuse: Internet safety and cyber risk for adolescents and emerging adults in the 21st century. *Social Work in Mental Health, 19*(1), 18-40. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332985.2020.1845281.

Sechi, C., & Vismara, L. (2023). Gender differences in the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteems, and online deception: A mediation model. *Journal of Affective Disroders Reports*, 14, 1-5.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior, 7,* 321-326.

Wang, F., & Topalli, V. (2023). The cyber-industrialization of catfishing and romance fraud. *CrimRxiv*, 1-41. https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.76272507