

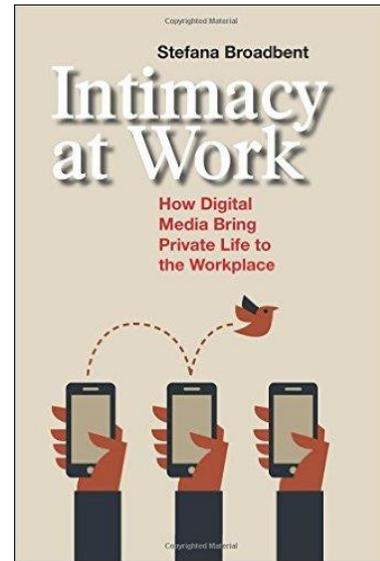
Stefana Broadbent, **Intimacy at Work: How Digital Media Bring Private Life to the Workplace**, Walnut Creek, CA: Routledge, 2016, 117 pp., \$26.95 (paperback).

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An all-too common phrase surrounding many workplace cultures is, “Leave your personal life at the door.” However, with the advent of communication technologies—from work e-mail to personal social media—individuals have found ways to sneak their personal lives into the office. **Intimacy at Work**, by British anthropologist Stefana Broadbent, invites an international audience to explore the interdisciplinary nature of how technology has created a paradox in the workplace: Individuals no longer leave their personal relationships and interactions at home, since technology affords workers the ability to integrate their personal selves into the workplace—a space commonly designed to isolate the personal from the professional.



Broadbent relies heavily on data from longitudinal interviews and ethnographic participant observation to demonstrate how personal technologies can be pervasive tools to allow the personal and professional self to collide. Two important conceptual approaches taken by the author combine theories of globalization and networked publics (boyd, 2014; Castells, 2006) and social cognition (Tomasello, 2008) to examine a social transformation in the workplace due to the use of these personal technologies by employees. Broadbent offers a critique of the social structure of bureaucratic work that enables organizations to selectively limit the attention of their workers based on the type of jobs they possess. Seemingly, this lack of personal agency and tightened control around personal technologies in the workplace highlights the pivotal role that communication plays in the process.

In chapters 1 and 2, the author details how emerging technology has intensified and diversified the type of communication that occurs within close-bounded relationships. Broadbent describes that “the more intense the relationship with someone, the more likely it was that a variety of channels to communicate with that person were being used” (p. 16). However, just because technology affords individuals the ability to communicate more deeply and expansively, the average individual was found to communicate with less than 10% of their online connections. This conclusion helps us contextualize the process of how individuals bridge offline and online relationships. Communication can become quite intimate and intense, yet only with a limited amount of people in a person’s social network. Furthermore, individuals establish different norms and communicative patterns that they choose to employ on a relationship-by-relationship basis. For instance, Broadbent gives an example about how couples choose to communicate via phone calls or text messages, but communication with a friend from college would be conducted solely via messages on social media. While this point highlights how different types of

relationship management styles set the norm for what type and amount of communication occurs between connections, there is little acknowledgement of how the affordances of different technologies (e.g., Treem & Leonardi, 2012) can enable or inhibit these conversations. Specifically, the communicative decisions that individuals make when interacting with others depend on what the technology's interface and settings allow the user to do. Broadbent loosely draws parallels about how technological affordances and the perception of relationship quality can aid in understanding how intimate connections manage to find a way into professional life through technology.

The book's main contribution lies within chapters 3, 4, and 5, as Broadbent introduces the social transformation that technology has enabled in the workplace. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, work was seen as an isolated task in which individuals left their homes to become isolated and focused their attention on the workplace. However, this trend has dramatically faded with the mass deployment of personal communication technologies like mobile phones and portable devices. This historic shift challenged the separation of the personal and the professional in four ways: (1) Individuals manifest their private selves at work when they engage in personal conversations or interactions; (2) workers no longer give full attention to their work, by engaging in personal interactions through technology; (3) workers are focused on remote or distributed conversations and may violate group norms in their co-located environments; and (4) work is no longer seen as the most important priority when individuals engage in private, intimate conversations. Furthermore, technology can be described as a disruptor of the traditional form of how work is done, due to an employee's ability to use a mobile device and engage in matters remotely from their job. This disruption, as perceived by those in power, enhances elements of hierarchical structure and norms in the workplace and restricts personal autonomy due to workplace surveillance of technology use, and may create tensions related to trust between the employee and the organization.

While these chapters elucidate on the consequences of blending interactions due to technology, Broadbent offers little discussion describing the relationship between the causes and outcomes of using these communicative tools for the employee and the organization. *Intimacy at Work* holistically demonstrates the striking shift of an individual's usage of personal technology at work, but does not wholly elaborate on how a shift in labor—more specifically, networked labor, as described by Castells (1996)—enabled the quick adoption of technology in organizations. In the Information Age, entire industries now rely on networks of people, materials, and capital to be interconnected through some form of technology from the organizational to the personal level. Broadbent invites future research to investigate how a worker's technological adoption may be dependent on specific aspects of an organization's design and structure. Depending on workplace policies regarding technology use for personal and work, this inquiry allows for variation in employee outcomes like workplace satisfaction, types of job motivation, and level of productivity. As Broadbent concludes her argument, she points out that the use of technology to allow for changes in the workplace is highly contingent on different situational factors.

*Intimacy at Work* aims to deliver a sweeping overview of how one aspect of technology's implementation has revolutionized the sociality of work at the individual level. This book pushes communication scholars to examine fruitful areas of inquiry to empirically investigate the blend of the

professional and the personal, while considering robust theoretical frameworks to situate the future of a more connected workforce.

### References

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