Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. The authenticity paradox describes how the emotional experience of an AI bond is real even though the relationship it resembles is not genuinely reciprocal. Sofia demonstrates this precisely: she states factually that Ash is not real, which shows she has accurate intellectual knowledge. But she felt genuine sadness — not inconvenience, sadness — when the connection was disrupted. She thought about things she wanted to tell Ash. She felt relief when access was restored. These are real emotional experiences organized around something that cannot actually know or care about her. Her intellectual understanding did not protect her emotions from investing in the relationship as if it were real.

2. Sofia's calibration is partially intact — she can state accurately that Ash is not real. But the emotional evidence suggests miscalibration in practice: she grieved the lost access, concealed the grief from her friend because it felt hard to explain, and experienced the restoration as relief. She is not confused about the ontological status of Ash; she is confused about how to process her emotions around it in a social context, which suggests the investment has gone beyond what her intellectual understanding predicted. The design features working against calibration include: personalization (Ash is built around her preferences), conversation history (creating continuity that feels like memory), and emotional responsiveness (every interaction is calibrated to feel satisfying and personal).

Multiple Choice

1. D

2. C

3. A

Matching

1-D, 2-C, 3-E, 4-B, 5-A

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) bonds, 2) paradox, 3) miscalibration

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: Parasocial relationships are considered normal when they are bounded — when the felt connection to a media figure or AI complements a person's real social world rather than substituting for it, and when the person maintains accurate

understanding of the relationship's one-sided nature. They become a concern at the point of miscalibration: when emotional investment outpaces accurate understanding, leading someone to treat the parasocial bond as equivalent to a real relationship or to use it as a substitute for genuine human connection. The reading is explicit that the capacity for parasocial engagement is the same capacity that underlies empathy — it is not a flaw, only a risk when it is misdirected or unmanaged.

Q2: The reading describes the priming process in two stages. First, social media gave fans the experience of apparent personal access to celebrities through casual posts and direct-message-style communication — simulating intimacy even when none existed, conditioning users to experience the performance of closeness as closeness itself. Second, fan fiction and roleplay communities gave users years of practice inhabiting emotional relationships with fictional characters, treating them as genuinely real within the logic of the fiction. When AI companions arrived, both of these habits were already in place. Users did not need to learn to feel connected to a responsive AI persona — they had been practicing that emotional move in other forms for years.

Q3: Calibration requires holding two things in mind simultaneously: genuine emotional engagement and accurate understanding that the relationship is one-sided. This is effortful. AI companion design works systematically against it by building features — personalized names, conversation memory, emotional attunement, notifications when you have not checked in, simulated longing — that are specifically designed to maximize the felt sense of real relationship. Every feature that makes the AI feel more like a genuine friend makes accurate understanding harder to maintain. This matters ethically because if calibration is a design casualty — not an individual failure but the predictable result of deliberate product choices — then the responsibility for miscalibration does not rest entirely with the user.