INTERNET ADDICTION
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A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment

Edited by
Kimberly S. Young
Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu

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Foreword

ELIAS ABOUJAOUDE, MD

Director, Impulse Control Disorders Clinic, Stanford University
School of Medicine

THE INTERNET has exploded to become a daily part of our lives. For the majority of individuals, the Internet represents an incredible information tool and unquestionable opportunity for social connectedness, self-education, economic betterment, and freedom from shyness and paralyzing inhibitions. For them, the Internet enhances their well-being and quality of life. For others, however, it can lead to a state that appears to meet the DSM definition of a mental disorder described as “a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome associated with present distress or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Dr. Kimberly Young, co-editor of this volume, was the first to bring clinical attention to this issue when she published a 1996 case report of problematic Internet use (Young, 1996). Her patient was a non–technologically oriented 43-year-old homemaker with a content home life and no prior addiction or psychiatric history, who within three months of discovering chat rooms was spending up to 60 hours per week online. The patient reported feeling excited in front of the computer and dysphoric and irritable when she would log off. She described having an addiction to the medium like one would to alcohol.

Since that report, a sizable and informative body of data originating in the East and West has accumulated over the past decade. Taken as a whole, the data tell a cautionary tale of the Internet’s real potential to cause psychological harm. Research studies have documented a variety of subtypes of Internet-related problems such as online sexual compulsivity, Internet gambling, MySpace addiction, and video game addiction, which the American Medical Association estimates five million children suffer from and once considered calling gaming overuse an addiction in its revised diagnostic manual.

The problem of Internet addiction is still relatively new, and while research has documented what has become a growing health care problem, no current books pull this body of literature together. Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment offers the first empirically based book to
address this emergent field. This book summarizes the research conducted to date and proposes clinical, societal, and public health interventions that target the general population as well as adolescents—a group deemed at higher risk for developing the problems discussed. This book will enable practitioners to learn about the contemporary and current clinical implications, assessment methods, and treatment approaches in screening and working with clients who suffer from this new addictive disorder.

For a medium that has so radically and irreversibly changed the way we conduct our lives, the Internet’s effects on our psychological health remain understudied, talked about more by sensationalism-driven reporters than practicing clinicians or expert researchers. And even as our understanding of basic Internet psychology lags, symptoms are changing as the technology evolves—from traditional browsers to smart phones that combine Internet capability with talking, texting, and video games. Simply stating that similar fears have been raised with every new technology misses the point: The immersive and interactive qualities of the virtual medium, combined with its sheer penetration into every aspect of life, make it different from all media forms that preceded it, and more prone to overuse or misuse. As our dependency on technology grows, this book adds to the clinical legitimacy and raises public and professional awareness of the problem that will enable future research in this evolving field to be conducted. This field is rapidly developing with new areas of scientific exploration, which is why research-driven books that educate us about the problems inherent in the virtual world are such a necessity.

REFERENCES


Acknowledgments

SOME SAY that the knowledge we’ll accumulate over the next five years will be greater than that collected throughout the history of mankind up until now. Surely a little more than a decade ago we would doubt this statement—imagining it was the result of exaggeration and faulty perspective. We were still using fax machines and watching movies on videocassette tapes, and the computer still was an object of both wonder and suspicion. But if we consider that the cell phones we carry reflect more sophisticated technology than the one in the Apollo 12 spacecraft, it may be that the outrageous-sounding prediction was correct.

We are at the epicenter of a major change in the history of science. We can be eyewitnesses to a great revolution in the field of knowledge and human behavior. There are many implications stemming from these changes, among them the consequences of this technology’s effects on everyday life. Reliance on the Internet has emerged as one of the issues challenging society, families, clinicians, and researchers. This book can shed some light on this subject, even though very little is yet known about the long-term implications of this new communication system. We hope this book helps professionals who work to relieve the suffering that the improper use of the Internet has brought to millions of people. This book is dedicated to those sufferers.

We would also like to thank Patricia Rossi and Fiona Brown at John Wiley & Sons and our agent, Carol Mann at the Carol Mann Literary Agency. They supported us and believed in our project.

KIMBERLY S. YOUNG, PhD
CRISTIANO NABUCO DE ABREU, PhD
About the Editors

D R. KIMBERLY S. YOUNG is an internationally known expert on Internet addiction and online behavior. Founded in 1995, she serves as the clinical director of the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery and travels nationally conducting seminars on the impact of the Internet. She is the author of Caught in the Net, the first book to address Internet addiction, translated in six languages, Tangled in the Web and her most recent, Breaking Free of the Web: Catholics and Internet addiction. She is a professor at St. Bonaventure University and has published over 40 articles on the impact of online abuse.

Her work has been featured in The New York Times, The London Times, USA Today, Newsweek, Time, CBS News, Fox News, Good Morning America, and ABC’s World News Tonight. She has been an invited lecturer at dozens of universities and conferences including the European Union of Health and Medicine in Norway and the First International Congress on Internet Addiction in Zurich. She serves on the editorial board of CyberPsychology & Behavior and the International Journal of Cyber Crime and Criminal Justice. In 2001 and 2004, she received the Psychology in the Media Award from the Pennsylvania Psychological Association and in 2000 she received the Alumni Ambassador of the Year Award for Outstanding Achievement from Indiana University at Pennsylvania.

D R. CRISTIANO NABUCO DE ABREU is a psychologist who has a PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Minho (UM) in Portugal with a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry, Hospital das Clínicas, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo (USP). He has experience in Cognitive Therapy and Internet addiction, and coordinates the Internet Addicts Program of the Impulse Disorders Clinic (AMITI) of the Institute of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo. With a pioneering work method in Brazil and Latin America, the unit has offered therapy sessions and counseling to adults, adolescents, and their family members since 2005. Dr. Nabuco de Abreu has also published numerous articles in Portuguese for various journals.
ABOUT THE EDITORS

He is the ex-president of the Brazilian Society of Cognitive Therapies (SBTC) and is a member of the Advisory Board of the Society for Constructivism in Human Science (USA). He is the author of numerous scientific articles and seven books on Mental Health, Psychotherapy, and Psychology, including, *Cognitive Therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy*, *Psychiatric Disorders: Diagnostic and Interview for Health Professionals*, and *Clinical Handbook for Impulse Control Disorders*, among others.
List of Contributors

Keith W. Beard  
Department of Psychology  
Associate Professor  
Marshall University  
Huntington, West Virginia

Ed Betzelberger  
Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery  
Proctor Hospital  
Illinois

Libby Bier  
Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery  
Proctor Hospital  
Illinois

Lukas Blinka  
Institute for Research on Children Youth and Family  
Faculty of Social Studies  
Masaryk University  
Czech Republic

Tonya Camacho  
Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery  
Proctor Hospital  
Illinois

Scott E. Caplan  
Department of Communication  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware

Shannon Chrismore  
Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery  
Proctor Hospital  
Illinois

David L. Delmonico  
Department of Counseling Psychology & Special Education  
Associate Professor  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Franz Eidenbenz  
Professional Psychologist for Psychotherapy  
Director of the Escape Center  
Zurich, Switzerland

Dora Sampaio Góes  
Impulse Disorders Outpatient Unit  
University of São Paulo  
Institute of Psychiatry  
Brazil

David Greenfield  
The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction  
West Hartford, Connecticut

Elizabeth J. Griffin  
Internet Behavior Consulting  
Minneapolis, Minnesota