

INTERNET ADDICTION

INTERNET ADDICTION

*A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation
and Treatment*

Edited by
Kimberly S. Young
Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu



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Contents

Foreword	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
About the Editors	xi
List of Contributors	xiii
Introduction	xv

PART I UNDERSTANDING INTERNET BEHAVIOR AND ADDICTION

CHAPTER 1	Prevalence Estimates and Etiologic Models of Internet Addiction	3
	<i>Kimberly S. Young, Xiao Dong Yue, and Li Ying</i>	
CHAPTER 2	Clinical Assessment of Internet-Addicted Clients	19
	<i>Kimberly S. Young</i>	
CHAPTER 3	Online Social Interaction, Psychosocial Well-Being, and Problematic Internet Use	35
	<i>Scott E. Caplan and Andrew C. High</i>	
CHAPTER 4	Uses and Gratifications of Internet Addiction	55
	<i>Robert LaRose</i>	
CHAPTER 5	Addiction to Online Role-Playing Games	73
	<i>Lukas Blinka and David Smahel</i>	
CHAPTER 6	Gambling Addiction on the Internet	91
	<i>Mark Griffiths</i>	
CHAPTER 7	Cybersex Addiction and Compulsivity	113
	<i>David L. Delmonico and Elizabeth J. Griffin</i>	

PART II PSYCHOTHERAPY, TREATMENT, AND PREVENTION

CHAPTER 8	The Addictive Properties of Internet Usage <i>David Greenfield</i>	135
CHAPTER 9	Psychotherapy for Internet Addiction <i>Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu and Dora Sampaio Góes</i>	155
CHAPTER 10	Working with Adolescents Addicted to the Internet <i>Keith W. Beard</i>	173
CHAPTER 11	Internet Infidelity: A Real Problem <i>Monica T. Whitty</i>	191
CHAPTER 12	Twelve-Step Recovery in Inpatient Treatment for Internet Addiction <i>Shannon Chrismore, Ed Betzelberger, Libby Bier, and Tonya Camacho</i>	205
CHAPTER 13	Toward the Prevention of Adolescent Internet Addiction <i>Jung-Hye Kwon</i>	223
CHAPTER 14	Systemic Dynamics with Adolescents Addicted to the Internet <i>Franz Eidenbenz</i>	245
CHAPTER 15	Closing Thoughts and Future Implications <i>Kimberly S. Young and Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu</i>	267
	Author Index	275
	Subject Index	281

Foreword

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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.

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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
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About the Editors

DR. 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.

DR. 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 Clinicas, 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.

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.

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Introduction

OVER THE past decade, the concept of Internet addiction has grown in terms of its acceptance as a legitimate clinical disorder often requiring treatment (Young, 2007). Hospitals and clinics have emerged with outpatient treatment services for Internet addiction, addiction rehabilitation centers have admitted new cases of Internet addicts, and college campuses have started support groups to help students who are addicted. Most recently, the American Psychiatric Association has decided to include the diagnosis of Internet addiction in the Appendix in the *DSM-V* as further studies are conducted.

Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment focuses on the current research in the field intended for academic and clinical audiences. The first study on Internet addiction occurred in 1996 by Dr. Kimberly Young when she presented her findings on 600 subjects who met a modified version of the *DSM* criteria for pathological gambling. The paper, "Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Disorder," was presented at the American Psychological Association's annual conference held in Toronto. While controversial at first, with academics debating the existence of the problem, since then empirical research on Internet addiction has grown substantially.

New studies across cultures and across academic disciplines have focused on understanding this new clinical and social phenomenon. New studies have furthered our understanding of Internet behavior and how adolescents and adults have come to use this new technology. New clinical studies have attempted to understand diagnosis, psychosocial risk factors, symptom management, and treatment of this new disorder. Internet addiction has been identified as a national problem not only in the United States but also in countries such as China, South Korea, and Taiwan, and government intervention has grown to battle Internet addiction and what has become a serious public health concern.

It is difficult to determine how widespread the problem is. One national study that originated from a team at the Impulse Control Disorders Clinic at Stanford University School of Medicine estimated that one in eight Americans suffers from at least one indicator of problematic Internet use. In other countries such as China, South Korea, and Taiwan, media reports suggest that Internet addiction has reached epidemic proportions.

During the late 1990s, research on Internet addiction grew. Health care professionals started seeing cases of people who suffered from Internet-related clinical problems. Pioneer treatment centers specializing in Internet addiction recovery emerged at McLean Hospital in the Boston area (a Harvard Medical School affiliate) and at the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital in Peoria, Illinois. Inpatient addiction rehabilitation centers such as the Betty Ford Clinic, Sierra Tucson, and The Meadows started to include Internet-related compulsivity as one of the subspecialties they treated. Globally, the first inpatient treatment center opened in Beijing, China, in 2006, and today, it is estimated that South Korea has more than 140 Internet addiction treatment recovery centers.

Research has also studied subtypes of Internet-related problems such as online sexual compulsivity, Internet gambling, MySpace addiction, and video game addiction. Video game addiction had become such a concern that in 2008 the American Medical Association estimated that five million children suffered from an addiction to games and considered calling gaming overuse an addiction in its revised diagnostic manual.

While much attention has been paid to Internet addiction in the academic and clinical fields, developing universal standards of care and assessment have been difficult because the field is culturally diverse and terminology in the academic literature has varied from Internet addiction to problematic Internet use, pathological Internet use, and pathological computer use, in the same way that different inventories are used for their assessment. With our reliance on technology, trying to define Internet addiction is even more difficult as we blur the boundaries between needing and wanting to use the Internet. We need to use the technology, so the question is: When is it an addiction?

The problem of Internet addiction is relatively new, and while research has documented what has become a growing health care problem, scientific understanding of the problem is evolving. *Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment* is the first comprehensive compilation of the current research to address this emergent field. The book is inclusive of both online and computer-related compulsions, making it relevant to a wide audience. Scholars searching for specific information on the latest research on Internet addiction and current trends in the field will find this book useful. Practitioners from a variety of fields, including social work, addiction counseling, psychology, psychiatry, and nursing in search of empirically based assessment and treatment methods will also find this book useful regarding evidence-based approaches.

The first part of the book provides a theoretical framework to understand how to define and conceptualize compulsive use of the Internet from a clinical perspective. The book includes various theoretical models from the psychiatric, psychological, communication, and sociological fields. Leading researchers from various countries explore the global and cultural impact of Internet addiction and combine these fields to conceptualize diagnosis of

Internet addiction and its prevalence. To further help therapists diagnose Internet addiction, this book examines the epidemiology and subtypes of Internet addiction such as online pornography, Internet gambling, and online games. The book also examines the impact of Internet use on children, individuals, and families, as well as risk factors that have been associated with the development of the disorder.

The second part of the book examines assessment and treatment of Internet addiction. As computers are relied upon with great frequency, health care professionals may be confronted with new cases of problem computer users. Yet, given the popularity of computer use, detecting the disorder may be difficult. Signs of a problem may easily be masked by legitimate use of the Internet, and clinicians may overlook signs because it is still a relatively new condition. Therefore, the book outlines assessment strategies to screen for and evaluate the presence of addictive use of the Internet, including clinical interview questions to ask, and describes the Internet Addiction Test, the first psychometrically validated measure of problematic Internet use (Widyanto & McMurren, 2004). Also, utilizing treatment outcome data, the book explores evidenced-based treatment approaches from a variety of clinical perspectives, including child and adult interventions, group therapy, 12-step recovery, and inpatient rehabilitation.

Finally, the implications of including the diagnosis of Internet addiction in the *DSM-V* are many. Its inclusion in the Appendix of the *DSM-V* would raise clinical legitimacy of the disorder to a higher level and would allow further scientific understanding of the nature of Internet addiction to be studied. The concluding chapter explores these implications and how greater public awareness and recognition of Internet addiction would bring new opportunities for future research funding on treatment and training. The concluding chapter also explores further areas for research such as long-term treatment outcomes and systematic comparisons of various treatment modalities to determine their therapeutic efficacy. We hope as the field continues to grow and evolve that this book opens an important dialogue for practitioners and scholars alike. We hope this book will enable practitioners to learn about the contemporary and current treatment approaches in screening and working with clients who suffer from this condition. We also hope this book serves as a resource guidebook for clinics, hospitals, inpatient rehabilitation centers, and outpatient treatment settings. Last, we hope it offers academics pursuing further research in the area of Internet addiction and online behavior a compendium of resources relevant to the contemporary literature in the field.

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