PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE: THEORY, RESEARCH, AND CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES

Adriano Schimmenti

The penetration of the Internet in almost every aspect of our lives is undoubtedly having a critical impact on the functioning of our minds and relationships. Actually, we are directly observing what many scholars from different fields – such as the philosophy of science, sociology, and psychoanalysis – predicted more than twenty years ago (e.g., De Kerckhove 1995, Levy 1997, Turkle 1996): New technologies are directly influencing and modifying our psychic processes by changing our approaches to communication, knowledge, social relationships, work, and so on. Despite the fact that research on this topic has dramatically increased in the past few years, the lively impression is that we still should better understand the effects of the Internet revolution on the architecture and emerging processes of our minds (Greenfield 2015).

Thus, a critical issue in contemporary psychology and psychiatry concerns how the dysfunctional use of the Internet is related to specific and aspecific expressions of psychopathology. About two decades of research following the seminal works of Young (1998) and Griffiths (1998) – who were among the first scholars describing the clinical phenomena of "Internet addiction" – has certainly advanced our understanding of Internet-related pathologies and has improved our assessment and treatment of people excessively or otherwise problematically using the Internet. Yet, despite the fact that many steps forward have been taken, we are still struggling with broad theoretical and clinical problems, such as the conceptualization of Internet-related disorders and problem behaviors, their definition and operationalization, the understanding of their origins and psychological correlates, and consequently, the development of effective preventative actions and tailored clinical interventions that can help professionals to address problematic Internet use in children, adolescents, and adults.

As such, this special issue of *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* includes original articles dealing with both the conceptualization and the psychological, social, clinical, and health correlates of problematic Internet use. It is worth noting here that the locution "problematic Internet use" was preferred over many other common terms that more or less apply in the current research context, such as Internet addiction, pathological Internet use, compulsive Internet use, excessive Internet use, or Internet gaming disorder (Schimmenti et al. 2014). In fact, on the theoretical level, problematic Internet use is a more general and comprehensive concept than the others are (despite the fact that all of the above mentioned terms are often used interchangeably in the international literature). Thus, it could be more appropriate to use it for a collection of articles dealing with a wide range of problems related to the abuse and misuse of the Internet.

I am particularly grateful to all of the authors who enthusiastically answered my invitation to submit a manuscript for this special issue, and those who provided so many excellent, innovative, and thought-provoking articles. Honestly, I was not entirely surprised by the high quality of the submissions because many of the contributors are among the most influential scholars in this field of research, so I had great expectations about their manuscripts. I am really happy to say that their works entirely met my expectations. Special thanks are also due to Giovanni Fioriti, the publisher of *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*, and to Donatella Marazziti, the editor-in-chief of *Clinical Neuropsychiatry*. They generously allowed me to act as a guest editor for this special issue and supported me during its entire realization.

Enna, November 21, 2016

References

De Kerckhove D (1995). *The skin of culture: Investigating the new electronic reality*. Somerville House, Toronto, ON.

Greenfield S (2015). *Mind change: How digital technologies are leaving their marks on our brain.* Random House, New York.

Griffiths M (1998). Internet addiction: Does it really exist? In J. Gackenbach (Ed) *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal applications*, pp. 61-75. Academic Press, New York.

Levy P (1997). *Collective intelligence: Mankind's emerging world in cyberspace.* Plenum Press, New York, NY.

Schimmenti A, Caretti V, La Barbera D (2014). Internet Gaming Disorder or Internet Addiction? A plea for conceptual clarity. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* 11, 5, 145-146.

Turkle S (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the internet*. Simon & Schuster, New York.

Young KS (1998). *Caught in the net: How to recognize the signs of Internet addiction–and a winning strategy for recovery.* Wiley, New York.