

# Learning Resource

## Online Addictions

### Introduction

Who would have thought that the internet could become a disease? For many, online addictions are very real. This topic explores the different types of computer addictions, differing theories on whether such addictions are diseases, and what to do if you or someone you know needs help.

### Discussion

According to studies at the Center for Internet Addiction (Young, n.d.):

- The number of office workers who admit to using the internet during work hours to visit social networking sites, to shop online, to read personal email, or to visit pornography, gaming or gambling sites has risen to over 70 percent.
- Depression, anxiety disorders, social phobias, and other compulsive disorders have strong links to those with an internet addiction.
- The most common forms of internet addiction are those that involve cybersex, online affairs, and online gaming.
- Internet predators are also likely to suffer from internet addiction.
- Children with an internet addiction have a greater tendency to suffer from depression, experience both social and academic problems at school, and may be at a greater risk to develop physical illnesses, obesity, or attention deficit disorder (ADD).
- Nomophobia (the fear of being without a phone) is being triggered by the growth in the availability and use of mobile phones and other portable devices such as tablets, "phablets," and wearable computing devices.

Computer addiction may or may not involve the internet. Internet addiction disorder (IAD), a term commonly used to describe most disorders, was first proposed by Dr. Ivan Goldberg (Beato, 2010). However, the term "addiction" itself tends to be controversial.

One term that seems to be more accepted is "problematic internet use" (PIU). PIU is generally considered to be "an impulse control disorder or an addiction similar to those associated with substances," in other words, " ...behavior operating in both producing pleasure and reducing painful [effects], causing negative health consequences, and being associated with unsuccessful attempts [to] stop or control this behavior" (Laconi, Tricard, & Chabrol, 2015).

The Center for Internet Addiction lists five types of internet addiction (Young, n.d.):

- Cyber-Sexual addiction (sexting and online sex)
- Cyber-Relationship addiction (infidelity and affairs)
- Gaming addiction (video games)
- Online gambling and shopping
- Excessive internet data retrieval

### Is It Real?

As mentioned, there is some disagreement among professionals as to whether IAD or PIU really exists. Many are quick to rush to the conclusion that the internet is creating addictions. However, some think that what many users new to the internet are going through is just a phase, or in medical terms, *phasic*. The theory is, as with anything new, some individuals experiment but then move on.

However, some can take it to an extreme. According to John M. Grohol, a leading psychologist in this area who has developed a model of Pathological Internet Use, when a new or existing user encounters a new online activity, three stages of involvement can be identified: enchantment (obsession), disillusionment (avoidance) and balance (normal) (Grohol, 2012). Although most internet users transition normally through all three stages, some users get caught in the first stage and are unable to escape on their own.

On the other hand, neither the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders nor the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases recognize IAD or PIU as a disorder. What most psychologists in this field agree upon, however, is that there are real dangers to certain users of the internet, despite from where the dangers emanate.

### Types of Computer or Internet Addictions

Let us now turn our focus to the five types of internet addiction (Young, n.d.).

- **Cybersexual addiction:** Involves the viewing, trading, or downloading of pornography, as well as participation in sexually explicit chat rooms, mobile texting (sexting), or discussion newsgroups.
- **Cyber-Relational addiction:** Involves the creation of "virtual relationships" that become excessive. In some cases, these relationships include "virtual adultery." Real relationships are often overtaken by relationships created on the web.
- **Gaming addiction:** Involves compulsive use of video and computer games, sometimes resulting in replacement of family, friends, work, and/or school with the fantasy world of gaming.
- **Net compulsions:** Involves obsessive participation in not just gambling (virtual casinos), but also in online shopping activities, online auctions, and stock trading (often what is referred to as "day trading").
- **Information overload:** Involves excessive use of the internet, both surfing and collecting data, such that the time spent doing this begins to interfere with an individual's personal life or work productivity.

One additional addiction can be identified which does not involve the internet. It could be labeled simply **computer addiction** and involves excessive or compulsive use of the computer for single-user computer games such as solitaire, Tetris, and Minesweeper.

### How Can You Tell if You Are Addicted?

There are many tests for IAD available on the internet (ironically enough) that can help you determine if you have a computer addiction. Try typing "internet addiction disorder test" into a browser. Some warning signs may include a preoccupation with the internet, increasing use of the internet to gain satisfaction, and failed attempts to cut back use of the internet (Young, n.d.).

### The Good News

Most addictions, including those that involve computers and the internet, are treatable. If you think that you may have an addiction, the best thing to do is seek help. Well-trained mental health professionals are able to successfully treat compulsive behaviors. The leading organization in the country is the American Psychological Association (APA). Through its website, you will find a wealth of information and a link that can help you locate a psychologist who can help.

### Summary

Internet addiction disorder, whether clinically a disease or not, can be a problem for many of us. In many cases, the internet makes existing addictions, such as compulsive shopping or gambling, more accessible and consequently compounds the problem. There is a wealth of resources available for those who want to learn more. More importantly, seek help if you or someone you know suffers from any form of addiction.

## References

Beato, G. (2010, July 26). Internet addiction. Retrieved from <http://reason.org/news/show/internet-additiona-diagnosis>

Grohol, J. (2012, October 26). *Internet addiction guide*. Retrieved from <http://psychcentral.com/netaddiction>

Laconi, S., Tricard, N., & Chabrol, H. (2015, July). Differences between specific and generalized problematic internet uses according to gender, age, time spent online and psychopathological symptoms. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, 236–244. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563215000850>

Young, K. (n.d.). Screen addiction. Retrieved from <http://netaddiction.com/compulsive-surfing>

---

© 2019 University of Maryland University College

All links to external sites were verified at the time of publication. UMUC is not responsible for the validity or integrity of information located at external sites.