Chapter 19
Digital Wellness:
Integrating Wellness in Everyday Life With Digital Content and Learning Technologies

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ABSTRACT

Are you addicted to your phone? Using the term "addiction" when discussing activities involving technologies is a metaphor. It is intended to portray behaviors that are similar to what is experienced during a drug addiction (Essig, 2012), but it is not an actual addiction. Granted, the metaphor is successful because it relates the experience of being "out of control". It is proposed that counselors and educators approach problematic behavior from more of a perspective of "wellness" and healthy behaviors - as opposed to approaching it from an addiction model or concept. Digital Wellness is the optimum state of health and well-being that each individual using technology is capable of achieving. The purpose of this chapter is to present the Digital Wellness Model (Royal, 2014) and provide recommendations for how the model can be implemented by users of technology. Specific strategies for promoting digital wellness are shared.

INTRODUCTION

Ninety-seven percent of young adults (ages 19-29) in the United States (regardless of income) use the internet (Pew Research Internet Project, 2014). Eighty-one percent of adults in America say that they use a laptop or a desktop computer somewhere in their lives—at home, work, school, or someplace else. Fifty-three percent of internet users indicate that the internet would be very hard to "give up", sixty-one percent of this group indicating that being online was essential for job related (or other) reasons (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Seventy-three percent of online adults and eighty-one percent of online teenagers use a social networking site of some sort (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 2009, more than half of online teens logged onto their favorite social media site more than once per day, and twenty-two percent logged on their favorite social media site more than ten times per day. Social media, and the internet, have been said to redefine the process by which teens communicate and disclose personal information (Farber, Shafron, Hamadani, Wald, & Nitzburg, 2012). The internet is used in so many ways...to communicate, socialize, meet people, to be entertained, play games, to learn or educate, and to work. People use digital technology on a daily basis to access information, solve problems, and develop as humans (Ayas & Horzum, 2013).

In the past several years, researchers have used an addiction concept to explain an imbalance in activities utilizing technologies (gaming, online pornography, social media, and general Internet use). It is considered more of a "behavioral addiction" in that the individual is not addicted to a substance, does not have the physical signs of a substance addiction, but they have certain symptoms and will undergo the same consequences brought about by addiction to alcohol and drugs (Alavi et al., 2012). Some of the consequences: Depression, withdrawal, social anxiety, isolation, obsessive thoughts, and disturbances in social relationships - just to name a few (Alavi et al., 2012; Farber et al., 2012; Ha, Chin, Park, Ryu, & Yu, 2008; Watson, 2005).

However, when mental health professionals use the term "addiction", they do so with specific diagnostic criteria. To classify "Internet Addiction" as an addiction means that the nature and causes of the problematic behavior - and the prognosis and treatment - are the same as other addictions. This is a misconception. Using the term "addiction" when discussing activities involving technologies is a metaphor. It is intended to portray compulsive, impulsive, self-destructive, and isolating behaviors - similar to what is experienced during a drug addiction (Essig, 2012). It is a successful metaphor because it relates the experience of being "out of control".

Too much use is suggested by some researchers and clinicians to be a problematic behavior (Watson, 2005). They claim that excessive users of technology may be so tied to their devices that it causes problems in relationships at home, work, or school. They may have periods of extended and excessive use - and are unable to decrease the amount of time they spend online. They may find it increasingly difficult to meet work, school, or domestic obligations (Watson, 2005). It is believed (by some) that select individuals, as a result of their use, may feel socially isolated and depressed. They may experience family conflict and academic or occupational problems. Baer, Saran, Green, and Hong (2012) claim that the overuse of electronic media (television, computer use, and gaming) has been consistently associated with the presence of psychiatric symptoms. Increased or excessive "screen time" in youth has been reportedly linked to obesity, musculoskeletal pain, sleep disruption, and loss of recreational activities (including sports, music, and unstructured play (Baer et al., 2012). There are other reported potential adverse consequences such as a decrease in school/work productivity, limited participation in household chores, and limited time spent with significant others (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2010).

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