



THE INTERNET AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: A GENERAL REVIEW OF THE IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT. *The Internet has grown exponentially from its original conception and now takes the form of a vast network of interconnected computers. It encompasses such a wide arena within science that its impact cannot be ignored. This article reviews some of the areas where the Internet is relevant to Clinical Psychology. Three main areas identified and expanded upon are (i) use of the Internet as a communication medium within this domain, (ii) teaching of the discipline, and (iii) use of the Internet as a tool for psychological research. Within these three areas, examples of the applicability of the Internet are discussed as well as its limitations. In summary, use of the Internet within the psychological domain has many advantages and as such should be embraced by the clinical psychologist.* © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd.

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EVERY SO OFTEN a technology emerges that has the power to radically alter society. The telephone and television are two recent examples of devices that society has incorporated into the daily routine of life. These devices are so ubiquitous that they have become almost natural elements in our environment. The computer is another technological device that has the same potential, particularly because of its importance for the continued existence and successful functioning of the global communications network known as the Internet.

The Internet may be the next technology widely adopted and incorporated into everyday usage. Both television and the telephone are important technological devices

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in our daily lives and their impact are the subject of a broad range of research efforts. For example, influence of television content (e.g., violence and sex) on behavior has been widely investigated (Williams, Zabrack, & Joy, 1982; see Paik & Comstock, 1994, for a review). Further, technology often alters how we perform the activities it is meant to augment, for example, telephone conversations have a structure quite different from other types of conversations (Goldthwaite, 1997a, 1997b). Hence, examining the impact of the Internet on behavior should prove both instructive and cautionary.

The Internet has the potential to have as great an impact on society and human behavior as the telephone and the television. Examining the effects of the Internet on clinical psychology as a discipline brings to the fore important issues; this article discusses two of these issues. First, it explores the Internet's influence on clinical psychology. The discussion focuses on developments of the Internet that serve to highlight areas that will have a particular impact on clinical psychology as a discipline. We argue that the Internet is a useful tool for all areas within the clinical psychologist's domain; further, it is now possible to investigate issues that take advantage of the Internet's unique aspects.

These areas will be addressed by elaborating on avenues where the Internet has made a considerable impact on clinical psychology as a discipline. First, we discuss its influence on academic communication. Second, we discuss its influence on how the discipline can be taught, and finally, its influence on research.

COMMUNICATION

Communication among colleagues is a vital part of any discipline. Keeping in touch with colleagues, editors, or students serves several valuable functions. It permits individuals to learn about the most current therapeutic practice, organize collaborative projects, and disseminate findings to the scientific community.

Electronic mail (e-mail) is by far the most common form of communicating in this area, and its use is increasing. One reason for the prevalence of e-mail is its ease of use. For example, contacting colleagues in another time zone poses many problems. Prior to e-mail, specified times needed to be arranged (e.g., at conferences), thus increasing the expense and time it takes to complete any collaboration. E-mail allows information to be sent instantaneously to a colleague who reads the message and responds at the earliest convenience.

Another development is Video conferencing (e.g., CU-SeeMe). This technology (<http://www.cuseeme.com>) allows individuals to have both visual and auditory cues as an aid to communication (Massaro & Stork, 1997).

In many ways the Internet is becoming not just another means of communications, but the preferred means of communication for the psychologist (Allie, 1995; Levy, 1995, for reviews). Whether it be for manuscript collaboration or grant writing, the Internet has become an invaluable resource (Levy & Ransdell, 1996). For instance, researchers wanting to initiate an investigation requiring an expensive resource, (e.g., functional neuroimaging), who do not have local access to such equipment can approach a researcher at another institution and discuss possible collaborative efforts. Further, the expertise of individuals in many different fields who are rarely at the same location can be used. The cost in both time and money of bringing different approaches together can be prodigious. As the Internet continues to develop, on-line

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