

Editorial

#instantmessaging and the Unbearable Distress of Being Online

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DOI 10.24989/dp.v3i1.2164

In recent years, instant messaging has become more and more popular. A broad range of instant messaging services has been integrated in the digital lives of most of us: Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media messaging services grow rapidly and especially young people are using this form of communication extensively. Therefore, it is not surprising that digital media and instant messaging are becoming the paramount communication channel, where interpersonal interaction and interactions of the future generation take place. It is easy to join different groups of peers, built new friendships online and stay in contact easily around the world. This is the optimistic experience, which instant messaging services transport in their advertisements. This is partially correct according to current research, which shows that social media and digital social interactions can be protective and buffer distress or help to recover from acute stress (Johnshoy, et al., 2020; Kothgassner et al., 2019). As such, digital social interaction may offer many benefits and enable many possibilities for the future generation. However, we have to keep in mind that this is also changing the way people experience social distress and social threats. One of these threats is definitely cyberbullying as well as a problematic communication culture which all induce negative affective states and can lead to psychopathology (e.g. Tsai et al., 2019). Especially negative emotions are associated with maladaptive behaviors such as self-harm (Glenn et al., 2011). Lewis and colleagues (2011) warned about possible contagion effects when – especially young – individuals are exposed to material of self-harm or suicide stories on the Internet. This is socially reinforced in social media as Brown and colleagues (2018) found in their research. Many adolescents engage in self-harm or suffer from suicidality, around 18 % (Muehlenkamp et al., 2012) are deliberately self-harming at least once in their life. Therefore, it is important to understand how negative social media communication can trigger or maintain such behavior. The work of Latina et al. (2022) in this issue will tackle this question in a qualitative study on adolescents with and without a history of self-harm. Apart from a broad range of treatment options for psychopathologies (Kothgassner et al.,

2020; Kothgassner et al., 2021) we need more awareness of this problem and a better understanding of mechanisms behind it to develop sufficient prevention strategies. Particularly, this will be needed during and after the current pandemic where many young individuals only communicated with their peers online (e.g. Humer et al., 2021; Pieh et al., 2021). Furthermore, the ongoing war in Ukraine following the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential for a worldwide economic crisis that will also affect many of the younger generation. Two more contributions in this issue tackle the transformation of social interaction – be it with regards to participation at school or with regards to the therapeutic relationship. We have a case report about the use of an avatar-based telepresence system for a pediatric patient for social participation and maintain school (Pletschko et al., 2022),

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as well as a full article about psychotherapy during the times of the COVID-19 crisis (Shklarski et al., 2022).

According to these developments, the team of Digital Psychology launches a call for papers for a special collection on “Digital interventions”. Furthermore, we invite researchers to send proposals for special issues that will be reviewed by the editors and the editorial board. Also, we are looking for two more Associate Editors for Digital Psychology. We welcome all persons holding a PhD degree and a track record with a strong emphasis on digital media and psychology to apply for this position. Please contact the editors or the editorial office for further information.

We wish you a pleasant read!

Oswald D. Kothgassner & Anna Felnhofer
Editors-in-Chief

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Conflict of interest

The Editors-in-Chief declare no conflict of interest.