The Human Condition and Behavioral Addictions

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This month’s issue of *Psychiatric Annals* features a series of articles on Problematic Internet Use and Behavioral Addictions, guest edited by Yvonne Yau, MSc, and Marc Potenza, MD, PhD. Reading these articles will show you what I believe is the first of a whole new universe of behavioral addictive clinical pathology about to unfold.

The *DSM-5* opened the floodgates for the concept of behavior addictions by moving gambling disorder from the Impulse Control Disorders section to the new Substance Related and Addictive Disorders section, under a last section, Non-Substance–Related Disorders. The committee recommending this found no other behavioral addictions supported by enough published research issues, but that is just a matter of time.

This series of articles considers possible candidates for inclusion as behavioral addictions such as Internet gaming disorder by Yau and Potenza; Internet gambling disorder by Howard J. Shaffer, PhD, and Paige M. Shaffer, MPH; and compulsive buying by Astrud Müller, MD, PhD, and James E. Mitchell, MD. Of course, this may be just the beginning of the candidates for other behavioral addictions, for example, sex addiction (there are already treatment centers in the US purporting to treat this). How about other candidates like exercise addiction, work addiction, food addiction, or carbohydrate addiction? There are probably people who experience similar consequences as those listed for addictions from over-participation in these activities.

Where does it stop? How about people who are addicted to their own beliefs or ideas? This phenomenon may have the potential to end humanity as we know it, given the growing crises looming from climate change, not to mention the accumulation and availability of nuclear weapons. How many nuclear explosions would it take to cause a global nuclear winter lasting a few generations? I’ll bet someone has calculated the answer.

I have heard that the neurobiological basis for addictions has been partially based on demonstrating an activating response in the dopaminergic reward system of the brain to items such as drug paraphernalia or gambling paraphernalia. I wonder if, in certain people, such activation could be demonstrated when they espouse their beloved ideas? Then we could understand why humans can justify almost anything, thought or done, under certain circumstances. Or why they cannot change their minds, even when the facts are clear.

In no way do I mean to criticize the concept of behavioral addiction. But, given the number of possible candidates in human beings, the implications are staggering. Maybe it provides another opportunity for understanding ourselves.