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MEN'S VIEWPOINT ON THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF FEMALE INTERNET ADDICTS DURING THE THERAPY PROCESS. RESEARCH ON YOUTHS IN THEIR ADULTHOOD

Perspektywa mężczyzn w spostrzeganiu społecznym kobiet uzależnionych od Internetu będących w procesie terapii. Badania osób we wczesnej dorosłości.

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Introduction

All therapeutic activities implemented towards people addicted to the Internet focus on achieving a state of controlled abstinence by the addict, until they acquire increasingly constructive forms of online behaviour.

As more and more effective forms of support for people who use the Internet in a destructive way are being sought, special attention is paid to what can promote abstinence and remaining abstinent during therapy and after completing it. Obviously, one of the factors helping to sustain this state (apart from personal predispositions and the ability to constructively cope with stress) is the social support system within the therapeutic community and outside of it¹. Social support is conditioned by the process of social perception, the purpose of which is to understand the surrounding reality and to take an appropriate approach towards it. This approach means “any direct attitude of one person towards another, which can be described in terms of a sign (+ or -) and intensity”².

The process of social perception of people is largely influenced by the properties of the perceived object. When we perceive a given person, we see their appearance (Czapiński, 1985, p. 98), and in the process of social perception, the social and professional role of the perceived person is an important category. It determines the position of the person in the social structure, the scope of their behaviours and characteristics. Perceiving a person based on their social roles consists in attributing such properties to them that are adequate in terms of the basic activity connected with a given role and which they should possess. The behaviour of the object is also important, both in task and non-task-related situations. The observed behaviour is the basis for inferring the characteristics and properties of the perceived person. Simultaneously, the perception process is influenced by the information provided by third parties about the observed object³.

¹ B. T. Woronowicz, *Uzależnienia. Geneza, terapia, powrót do zdrowia*, Wyd. Media Rodzina, Warszawa 2009, s. 24.

² J. Czapiński, *Przesłanki ustosunkowani wobec innych ludzi*, Psychologia spostrzegania społecznego, Lewicka M., Trzebiński J. (red.), Wyd. Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1985, s. 93.

³ K. Skarżyńska, *Spostrzeganie ludzi*, Państwowe Wyd. Naukowe, Warszawa 1981, s. 140-141.

The way a given person is perceived also depends on the relations that exist between the perceived person and the perceiving subject. When observing another person, one can adopt an external or internal perspective. The external perspective occurs when there is no connection between the object and the subject, and they are indifferent to each other. The internal perspective results from the following conditions:

- the behaviour or properties of the object have consequences for the perceiving subject;
- the observing subject knows the object, has an established representation concerning them, shows a specific attitude towards them and sees that the observed person has a specific attitude towards them;
- the observing subject intends to spend a specific amount of time with a given person;
- demonstrates certain behaviours towards the object (hostile or friendly)⁴.

In this context, it can be concluded that knowing the object of perception based on previous experiences, its cognitive representation change the reception and processing of the information about a given person. The more attractive a person is in social perception, the more positive their social image, the greater the probability of attributing to them favourable, positively seen characteristics in subsequent situations.

The commonly presented image of an addicted woman is definitely different than that of an addicted man, and it tends more to attribute negative traits to women. An important feature of such perceiving of women's addiction is the social context, the collective belief of a specific group of people⁵. Hence, its role in scientific research is so fundamental. A certain common perception of a given social group, including addicted women, bears traces of common opinions, hence two aspects of the image of addicted women appearing in the relevant literature: traits related to lack of effectiveness, lack of rationality, independence, determination and courage⁶.

Self-perception of addicts can be comparable and correlates with the degree of stereotypical perception of addicted people by the social environment. The stronger the belief in a given society in the negative characteristics of addicts and the lower their self-esteem, the higher the percentage of society members who perceive addiction in a more negative, and also stereotypical, way. Social environment studies conducted so far have demonstrated similar results: the older the age of the respondents, and at the same time the lower their education as well as social and professional status, the greater the tendency to demonstrate stereotypical thinking about addicts, including women. Addicted people, including women, struggle with both their own negative perception of the addiction and stereotypical perception of them by their environment, which is an additional burden in struggling with the addiction, including prevention and therapy⁷.

1. Materials and method

The semantic differential was used as a research method in the studies. It was used in four cases to describe the following concepts: man, man in therapy, woman, woman in therapy⁸. In order to obtain an image of women and men in the process of Internet addiction therapy, 28 pairs of polarized adjectives were selected, relating to typically human traits, to compare how women and men are perceived in the therapeutic group two new differentials were created describing with the same pairs of adjectives women and men respectively. All four differentials featured

⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 188.

⁵ E. Woydyłło, *Sekrety kobiet*, Wyd. Literackie, Warszawa 2005, s. 32.

⁶ Z. Gaś, *Rodzina a uzależnienia*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu M. Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 1993, s. 22.

⁷ E. Mandal, *Podmiotowe i interpersonalne konsekwencje stereotypów związanych z plcią*, Wyd. Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2000, s. 128.

⁸ Semantic differential is a method that combines the scaling and association procedures (Czapiński, 1978). The creators of the method, C. Osgood, G. J. Suci and P. H. Tannenbaum, assumed that the connotative meaning of a concept can be defined in many independent dimensions that determine the semantic space.

twenty-eight and the same polarized pairs of adjectives⁹. In total, with three factors, the total variance was explained in 63.685%. The factors included the following pairs:

1. Determination and strength of character (responsible-irresponsible, determined-not determined, permanent-changeable, trustworthy-untrustworthy, brave-cowardly, patient-impatient).

2. Interpersonal contacts (pairs of adjectives: sensitive-indifferent, sociable-isolating, honest-dishonest, attractive-unattractive).

3. Autonomy of behaviour (corresponding pairs of adjectives: dominant-submissive, independent-dependent, creative-reproductive).

The tool applied met the criteria of psychometric relevance and reliability.

A group of 100 men were examined using the method described above, including 50 (50%) of participants of an Internet addiction therapy program and 50 university students of psychology and pedagogy (constituting the control group)¹⁰. In the research group, the participants were from 21 to 24 years old (M=22.2, SD=1.05), and in the control group from 20 to 27 years old (M=22.9, SD=1.47).

When employing the semantic differential method in relation to women undergoing Internet addiction therapy, the following question was put forward: Are there any statistically significant differences in the perception of women undergoing Internet addiction therapy in the group of men undergoing and not undergoing therapy in the dimensions such as determination and strength of character, interpersonal contacts and autonomy of behaviour?

All respondents agreed to participate in the study.

2. Results

Three factors were distinguished in the semantic differential (factor I – determination and strength of character, factor II – interpersonal contacts, factor III – autonomy of behaviour), for which results indicating intra-object differences as well as differences within a given factor at the group level will be presented. The analysis of individual variables such as gender, therapy and individual combinations of these variables by group and variance: gender, therapy, clinical and control group, revealed significant variables.

Factor I – determination and strength of character of women

Taking into account the gender of the respondents alone, statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$) can be observed for the factor relating to determination and strength of character (table 1).

Table 1. Tests of intra-object effects for factor I – determination and strength of character

Coefficient of Variation	Sphericity of variance	Type 3 sum of squares	df	χ^2	F	p
Gender		111.831	1	11.831	70.245	0.000
Gender/Group		12.691	1	12.691	7.972	0.006
Therapy		12.603	1	12.603	22.174	0.000
Therapy/Group		8.051	1	8.051	14.166	0.000
Gender/Therapy/Group		7.770	1	7.770	14.691	0.000

⁹ After eliminating pairs of polarized adjectives that appear in more than one factor, three factors were distinguished. (factor 1 explained 52.014% of the variance, factor 2 – 6.371%, factor 3 – 5.300% of the total variance). In total, with three factors, the total variance was explained in 63.685%.

¹⁰ The sample used in the study was selected based on the age of the respondents, which is connected with the assumption that the personality of people of this age is relatively established, thanks to which the obtained data can be considered as relatively stable indicators of behaviours for a given population of respondents.

Both women and men demonstrate significant differences in the mean scores for the determination and strength of character factor. Women, regardless of undergoing addiction therapy or not, are perceived as less determined, composed, trustworthy and resilient in terms of their personality (M=3.48) than men (M=2.42), which is connected with worse perception of these traits in women.

For the gender and group variable (participation in therapy or not), the difference between women and men for the factor was statistically significant ($p=0.006$), for the complex sphericity statistics). Analysis of individual means in the determination and strength of character factor revealed that the image of women in therapy in the group of men in therapy is neutral (M=3.76). Men in the control group have a more positive attitude towards women in factor I (M=3.19).

Comparison of the scores for women in therapy in the clinical and control groups gave the following results. Students perceive women in therapy much more positively than men in therapy do. The image of women in therapy, as emerging from the results obtained in the control group shows that they present characteristics related to courage, composure, and they can also be responsible (M=2.75). Men undergoing addiction therapy perceive women in therapy as rather average in terms of determination and strength of character, they are not highly courageous, determined or composed, and they are not timid or irresponsible.

Analysis within factor I also revealed that women who are not in therapy are perceived by both groups of men in a very similar way, which indicates that in the perception of men women demonstrate characteristics from this factor on an average level (men in therapy: M=3.64, SD=1.30; control group: M=3.63, SD=1.19).

Factor II – interpersonal contacts

Analysis of the scores within factor II revealed statistically significant differences by the division into gender, participation in therapy and belonging to a group (clinical or control). Taking into account the gender of the respondents alone, without referring to participation in Internet addiction therapy, statistically significant differences were recorded at the level of $p<0.001$, for the complex sphericity statistics (table 2).

Table 2. Tests of intra-object effects for factor II – interpersonal contacts

Coefficient of Variation	Sphericity of variance	Type 3 sum of squares	df	χ^2	F	p
Gender		17.745	1	17.745	14.331	0.000
Therapy		165.444	1	165.444	193.851	0.000
Gender/Therapy		20.138	1	20.138	41.268	0.000
Gender/Therapy/Group		8.338	1	8.338	17.086	0.000

Within the analysed factor, women are perceived more favourably than men (M=2.97), as sensitive, emotional and open to interpersonal contacts. These conclusions correspond to certain natural differences referring to gender, concerning interpersonal needs and verbal skills. Women are characterised by better developed verbal skills and, when communicating with the environment, they refer to emotions more often than men.

The variance that showed significant differences in the perception of women is the influence on the gender of such a variable as participation in the therapeutic group and belonging to the clinical or control group. The analysis of dependencies showed statistically significant results at the level of $p<0.001$).

Women in the therapeutic group are perceived by addicted men within factor II as having an average dimension of traits indicating sensitivity, attractiveness, emotionality and sociability (M=4.08). The above results were compared with the results concerning women in general,

which show that the image of a woman not in therapy is connected with a deeper perception of these traits by men (clinical group: M=2,04; control group: M=2.16).

Factor III – autonomy of behaviour

Analysis of individual intra-object variables, such as gender, therapy and individual combinations of these variables by belonging to the research group, statistically significant differences were obtained ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Tests of intra-object effects for factor III – autonomy of behaviour

Coefficient of Variation	Sphericity of variance	Type 3 sum of squares	df	χ^2	F	p
Gender		184.960	1	184.960	107.527	0.000
Gender/Group		49.468	1	49.468	28.758	0.000
Therapy/Group		10.028	1	10.028	10.029	0.002
Gender/Therapy		5.921	1	5.921	8.398	0.005
Gender/Therapy/Group		5.760	1	5.760	8.169	0.005

Within factor III, women are perceived as less dependent (M=3.97), dominant and creative than men (M=2.60), which was confirmed by the obtained means for the measured factor. In this dimension, women are better perceived by men in the control group than in the clinical group (M=3.82), however, these results also reveal differences in favour of men in general (M=2.05).

The element that in a statistically significant way indicates differences in perception of women is the division into two research groups, men in therapy and not in therapy.

Referring independence, creativity and dominance to the obtained results, men in therapy perceive women not in therapy (M=4.32) as those who moderately demonstrate these attributes, women in therapy achieved better results in this group (M=43.91) than the group under treatment. A similar image of women was revealed in the scores of the control group, where women under treatment are seen as moderately independent and dominant (M=3.69) in contrast to women who do not require therapeutic support (M=3.95) (table 4).

Table 4. Third factor means for the differential: man, man in therapy, woman, woman in therapy in the clinical and control groups

Factor III Respondents	Group	M	SD	N
A man	Clinical group	2.25	0.91	50
	Control group	2.81	0.96	50
	Entire group	2.53	0.97	100
A man in therapy	Clinical group	1.85	0.84	50
	Control group	3.51	1.23	50
	Entire group	2.68	1.34	100
A woman	Clinical group	4.32	1.22	50
	Control group	3.95	0.84	50
	Entire group	4.13	1.06	100
A woman in therapy	Clinical group	3.91	1.53	50
	Control group	3.69	1.09	50
	Entire group	3.80	1.33	100

It should be stressed that only in this factor the group itself differentiates the dimension of the third factor at the level of $p=0.001$ ($df=1$, $F=11.662$).

The analysis of semantic differential factors for the concepts: woman, woman in therapy, man, man in therapy revealed statistical differences for individual concepts (table 5).

Table 5. Value of the Mann-Whitney U test for the distance between the concepts: woman, woman in therapy, man, man in therapy

	M-MW	M-K	M-KW	MW-K	MW-KW	K-KW
Z	-3.251	2.534	-1.861	-2.485	-3.471	-2.041
p	0.001	0.011	0.063	0.013	0.001	0.041

Legend: M – men, MW - a man in therapy, K – woman, KW- a woman in therapy

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test indicate statistically significant differences in the distances between the concepts used in the differential, except for the distance between the dimensions man - woman in therapy. A statistically significant difference occurs for the distance of the concepts man-woman ($p=0.011$, $z=-2.534$). The control group reveals a more similar image of women and men in the three factors discussed than the clinical group.

Statistically significant differences can also be seen in the concepts man in therapy - woman at the level of $p=0.013$ ($z=-2.485$). The distance is greater in the clinical group than in the control group, which confirms the similar perception of men in therapy and women for the three dimensions of the analysed semantic differential.

The significance level for the distance woman in therapy - man in therapy was $p=0.001$ for the Mann-Whitney U test equal to $z=-3.471$. The difference between these concepts is large in the clinical group. This shows that women in therapy and men in therapy are perceived differently in the dimension of the three factors distinguished in the studies. The distance between the concepts woman-woman in therapy is also significant at the level of $p=0.041$ ($z=-2.041$). The control group perceives the concepts woman-woman in therapy closer to each other than the group of men in therapy.

3. Discussion

The research done with the use of semantic differential brought interesting results. The analysis of the obtained results revealed differences in the perception of women undergoing Internet addiction therapy in the individual groups of surveyed men.

In the factor referring to strength of character, women in therapy are perceived as being rather average in terms of determination and strength of character, they do not exhibit a high level of courage, determination or composure, and are not seen as irresponsible and cowardly. The image of addicted women undergoing treatment is definitely better in terms of content in the control group than in the clinical group. In the control group of men, women are perceived as brave, composed and determined. These men show a better attitude towards women, more often declaring kindness than indifference towards them. To some extent, the attitude towards addicted people also depends on one's own experiences with addicts. Respondents who personally know addicted people more often declare kindness and less often indifference (*Raport 2023. Uzależnienia w Polsce, 2023*). [2023 Report. Addictions in Poland].

Similar preferences are revealed for the factor of interpersonal contacts. Within this factor, women in therapy are perceived by men in therapy as demonstrating an average dimension of features, including as less sensitive, attractive, emotional and sociable.

Comparing the results of the factor referring to autonomy of behaviour in individual groups, statistically significant differences are also noted. The clinical group sees in women a lower intensity of traits such as creativity, independence and dominance. Men in the control group perceive addicted women as more autonomous and independent than men in therapy do.

Summing up the data on the perception of women addicted to the Internet undergoing therapy by both groups of men, statistically significant differences were found in the surveys.

4. Conclusions

- The Osgood semantic differential method used in the studies fulfilled the assumed expectations. Such studies are worth undertaking, because they are a sort of a barometer of attitudes towards addicted people, including addicted women.

- The method presented in the study of men turned out to be relevant and brought many interesting results. Analysing the social perception of problems such as addictions provides knowledge about the social aspect, examines the possibility of simplifications or generalizations of opinions about addicts, including addicts of the opposite sex. The reasons for the achieved results can be seen in the selection of the control group, including in the effective education of students about addictions and addicts, as well as in changes in the social communication about them.

- An important aspect of the conducted research was the analysis of valuation of features attributed to addicted women in therapy. These features appear to be more negative compared to addicted men in therapy.

- Both the conducted research and the findings presented in the relevant literature contribute to the recognition of the scale of stereotypes about people addicted to the Internet, including addicted women, and can become a starting point in the prevention and therapy of addictions and in the formulation of social policy preventing the stereotyping of the lives of addicted women in therapy.

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