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Health anxiety in the digital age

Moa Goysdotter

Health anxiety is a growing health problem that in a number of studies have been shown to correlate with increased digitization and amount of information on the Internet (e.g. Baumgartner & Hartmann 2011). The new diagnosis "cyberchondria" is used to describe people with health anxiety who use the Internet excessively to search for health information. The concept however, only explains a portion of the health anxiety problem emerging in the digital culture. An important part of the problem is the shift of responsibility where the individual is expected to take more and more responsibility for their own health (Lewis 2006). A symptom of this shift in responsibility is Quantized Self (QS)- technology by which biological bodily data is made accessible to users who in general are not educated in interpreting biological data. Eugene Thacker means that the human biological body and the computer no longer are possible to separate (2004) and this anthropomorphic relation is something that can be studied in the emerging movement around QS-technology that is called "self-hacking". Self-hackers use QS-technology in order to "optimize" their bodily organisms and "hack" and control" them as if they were computers.

Health anxiety in the digital age consists of a combination of different relations between mankind and technology where the body is of central importance. By examining the emerging digital health anxiety from Don Ihde's three technology relations; background relations, hermeneutic relations, and alterity relations (Ihde 1990) I will try to deepen the understanding of health anxiety in the digital age, and complement the previous research made on "cyberchondria".

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