

Internet addiction – college



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Social Impact of the Internet 8 October 1997 ABSTRACT The Internet is the largest source of information in the world today. With its web sites and chat rooms, it is a means of communicating with people in places all over the face of the earth. Since its conception in 1973, the Internet has grown at a whirlwind rate. 51 million adults, were on-line as of the second quarter 1997 in the United States alone. Some say that the Internet is so enjoyable that it is almost addictive.

The problem is that researchers are beginning to agree with them. Studies are revealing that there may be an actual form of addiction involved with over-use of the Internet. Identifying which category of addiction the Internet falls into is the problem.

There are no real answers yet because research in this area is at the beginning stages. While lost in this so called Cyber Community for long periods of time, people are neglecting other important activities like; time with the family, socializing, work and health concerns. One of the most extensive studies on Internet Addiction to date was conducted by Dr.

Kimberly S. Young of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. In her study, she revealed concrete evidence supporting the Internet Addiction claim. However, help for web addicts is available. There are several web sites available for the treatment of Internet addiction, as well as counseling centers and clinics.

Is it Live, or is it Internet? Internet Addiction The Internet is the largest most versatile source of information in the world today.

With its web sites and chat rooms, it is a means of communicating with people in places all over the face of the earth. But with all this power at our fingertips, are there any negative impacts of using this interface? Are we as simple humans capable of interacting with such a powerful communication source. Recent studies are beginning to uncover evidence that would suggest that maybe some of us are not so capable of dealing with this technology.

In fact, as more research is conducted, experts are finding that the Internet may even be addictive! Development of the Internet began about 15 years ago. In 1973 the U. S. Defense Research Projects Agency initiated a program to research the techniques and technologies for inter-linking various types of networks.

1 The objective was to develop communication protocols that would allow networked computers to communicate transparently across multiple, linked networks.

This was called the internetting project and the system of networks that emerged from the research was known as the Internet. Since that time, various other research projects, to include those conducted by the U. S. National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, have shaped and tailored this project to give us the Internet as we know it today. (1) The Internet has now grown to include over 4500 Service Providers in the United States alone.

A survey by Christian Huitema of Bellcore indicated that there were 26 million host computers on the Internet as of September 1997. 2 A survey

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conducted by Intelli Quest Information Group Inc. showed that 51 million adults, age 16 or older, were on-line as of the second quarter 1997 in the United States alone. ³ With such a large portion of the population swimming in this seemingly never-ending sea of information, what is the real impact of the Internet on society? It seems that the majority of society thinks the Internet is the greatest invention since the telephone.

This is probably best justified by the whirlwind rate at which the Internet grows. In fact, some say that the Internet is so enjoyable that it is almost addicting! The problem is that recent studies have shown that the Internet may not only be addicting because it is enjoyable, but that a fairly large number of users are experiencing addiction of a clinical form.

⁴ Identifying which category of addiction the Internet falls into is another problem. There are no real answers yet because research in this area is at the beginning stages. A few researchers are comparing the Internet's effects to marijuana as a psychostimulant. They argue that the chemicals in marijuana activate the same stimuli as the Internet. ⁵ Most researchers to this date do, however, agree that this is some type of behavioral addiction. People can become addicted to activities even when there is no physiological dependence or physiological addiction.

Overeating, sex, work, exercise and gambling can be addictive if done to excess. ⁶ Behavioral addiction means (2) that the activity alters your emotional state in some way. The main way to determine if an activity is addictive is if it is having a negative impact on some other important area of your life. The questions to be answered now are, if there is such a thing as

Internet addiction, what are the effects of this addiction and why are people falling into this trap? According to Dr.

Maressa Orzack of the Computer Addiction Services at Harvard Universitys McClean Hospital in Boston, " The single greatest factor in becoming an addict is boredom." " Theyre lonely, and the Internet, with its chat rooms and endless information, fills a need." 7 The chat rooms, whether they are used for sexual and romantic encounters or just to talk to other people around the world, seem to be the number one temptation.

Others include fantasy games and the ability to create false identities of oneself.

Although this ability to create a false identity is not one of the main lures, it does play a major role when looking at the psychological effects of the Internet. Identity is a key factor in everyones life. Without a sense of identity, or a confused identity, people have difficulty socializing with others. They also have a difficult time dealing with stress and the real world and therefore resort to other measures where there is no direct contact with other people. On the Internet, there is no direct communication.

Therefore an insecure person or a person with low self-esteem does not have to worry about what the person on the other end of the link thinks about them. They may modify their identity, work position, marital status, or any (3) other of a number of characteristics that affect their role in life. The real problem with this addiction, however, is its sociological effects.

A number of people say that the Internet is like traveling. They say each trip is like a new journey and you never know where it is going to take you.

The problem is that they spend so much time on the net that they withdraw from regular society. They escape reality into a culture with no real boundaries or existence. While lost in this so called Cyber Community for long periods of time, they are neglecting other important activities like; time with the family, socializing, work and health concerns. Internet abuse has been cited as a contributing factor in the disintegration of marriages and families, and the collapse of promising careers.

8 But is there really a problem or are researchers just looking for something that is not actually there?

One of the most extensive studies on Internet Addiction to date was conducted by Dr. Kimberly S. Young of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. In her study, Dr.

Young determined that Non-dependents were able to control the amount they used the Internet and reported no adverse effects due to its use. However, dependents reported significant changes to their lives because they had simply lost control over their ability to limit the amount of time they used the Internet. 9 She compared the use of the Internet to criteria traditionally utilized for other established addictions and found significant identical values. 9 She did, however, state that the Internet itself is not addictive, but that specific areas such as the chat rooms, play a significant role in the (4) development of the addiction. Research is not, however, the

only evidence that a problem exists. As the Internet continues to expand, the number of horror stories increases.

In Cincinnati, a mother was arrested for neglecting her three young children because she was spending too much time on the Internet. ⁷ It was reported that she was spending 12 hours a day on line while her kids were locked in a room in a filthy apartment. In addition to this case, all one has to do is browse the Internet addiction sites to find many other people and their individual stories. Now you will probably ask, If there really is an addiction, what are the symptoms and is help available? The list of Internet Addiction symptoms is long. Most Researchers in this area stated that any combination of the symptoms could identify a person as an addict.

The symptoms include: — You neglect important family activities, social events, work responsibilities, academic projects or health concerns to spend hours on the Internet.

— A significant person, such as a boss, close friend or partner, has complained you're spending too much time or money on the Internet. — You are constantly anticipating your next on-line session. — It becomes impossible to cut back on your Internet time. — Losing track of time once on-line.

— You check your email compulsively. (5) — You develop cravings and withdrawal symptoms when you are away from the computer. — You skip meals, classes or appointments to get on the Internet. — You would rather talk to people on-line than face-to-face. — You sleep less than five hours a night so you can spend more time on-line.

— You are having increased difficulty discussing matters not related to the Net. The dilemma here is that most people will not admit they have a problem (as with most other addictions). Some researchers state that people may be using the Internet to substitute for other addictions.

When someone finally realizes they have a problem, however, help is available.

There are a number of web sites available for the treatment of Internet addiction. They include sites like Welcome to the Web Addicts Detox Page or “ The Internet Anonymous Virtual Meeting Page.” There is even software available for addicts. One such package is Grahams Mac Shareware.

However, trying to cure on-line addiction by going on-line is probably not the best answer. Face to face counseling is probably the best method for dealing with this problem. The availability of this type of counseling is expanding rapidly. Over the past two years, two major clinics have also been established to treat this addiction. One that was mentioned earlier is at Harvard Universitys McClean Hospital in Boston.

The other is the Center for On-Line Addiction at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. The latter is Directed by Dr. Kimberly S. (6) Young whose research was also mentioned earlier. To this date, her clinic alone has reviewed more than 400 Internet Addiction cases. 8 The Internet has grown rapidly since its beginnings in 1973.

It has spread to all corners of the earth bringing multitudes of information and communication capabilities to people everywhere. The problem for some

people is that it may be too much to control. Addiction to the Internet affects the victim both psychologically and socially. Research in this area is still in the beginning phases, but the results warrant further studies.

If you feel that you are losing control, help is available both on and off-line. However, the best advice offered by experts for when you begin losing touch with reality is to just pull the plug. (7)

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