

SOURCE LINES

Life, Love and the Internet

Have you ever noticed how much our daily lives are tied to the Internet. From retrieving and writing email, to Internet banking, downloading music, finding health information, shopping, chatting with friends or booking flights, many of us have a dependence on the Internet that we would never have dreamed of just a decade ago. Our reliance becomes starkly apparent when your Internet service or computer is down.

The Internet Generation

If the Baby Boomers are the TV generation, then our children are the Internet generation. Many do not remember to a time without the Internet. Have you noticed how they spend all day with their friends and then at night spend as much time with them on-line? They claim to be doing homework - researching for their next assignment. It is instant access 24/7 to your peers. Like the TV, the Internet brings great benefits but it also has some social costs.

Technology and Social Behaviour

The fear of technology's effects on society is not a new concern. The most famous example is the uprising against technology by the Luddite movement in England in the 1800's. The Luddites, named after their leader Ned Ludd, organized against technological ad-

vances in the textile industry in the Regency area of England from 1811-1816. Armies of villagers would sneak into the mills at night and would destroy the new machinery that was replacing the conventional person-to-person methods. The movement's purpose was not just to reject technology in order to save jobs. The Luddites were uprising against the threat of technology to the social fabric of their work and their way of life. While there may be no reason for a 'Luddite movement' to destroy the Internet, there is good reason to reflect on the social impact of the Internet.

Internet and Depression

For those looking for excitement, risks, adventure, escape, comfort or love, the Internet can be deceptively engaging. The ease of access, privacy, and anonymity makes the Internet incredibly appealing. There are unlimited possibilities for happiness in a universe of website activities. Without the social inhibitions that are part of in-person contact, some people confuse Internet relationships with real life relationships. Overuse of the Internet leads to social isolation from family and friends. Recent studies found that the more time spent on the Internet the greater the probability one will suffer from depression. As counsellors, we see

many people who are unhappy with their life, their marriage, or their job and who have become entangled with the Internet in some negative way - gambling, pornography or an affair. Their search for happiness created more suffering for themselves and others.

Real Life vs. Simulation

In chat rooms or with Internet games, people take on a persona, an alter ego, or a fantasy character. On the Internet no one knows your real name! It is a great place to hide and yet participate without responsibility. Is exploring sexual fantasies with someone on the Internet through email harmless? Not sure? Ask your real-life partner. Simulation can be mistaken for real life for those who are lonely and vulnerable, have distorted perceptions and a have sense of desperation.

When the Internet Becomes a Problem

The Internet has many benefits and most people use it in moderation. Some people get addicted to all sorts of things – drugs, alcohol, gambling, and sex. Behaviour becomes an addiction when it is compulsively repeated without really satisfying a need, it causes unhappiness and disrupts other's lives. Here are a few questions to ask if you are worried that a family member, a friend, a colleague or

you yourself might need to seek help.

- Are you neglecting important things in your life because of this behaviour?
- Is the behaviour disrupting your relationships with important people in your life?
- Do important people in your life get annoyed or disappointed with you about this behaviour?
- Do you get defensive or irritable when people criticize this behaviour?
- Do you feel guilty or anxious about what you are doing?
- Have you found yourself being secretive about or trying to cover up this behaviour?
- Have you tried to cut down, but were unable to?
- If you are honest with yourself, do you feel there is another hidden need that drives this behaviour?

If you answer 'Yes' to two or more of these questions could mean trouble. If you're worried, please give your EAP a call.

Random Thought

Say what you mean and
Mean what you say
And don't be mean
When you say it

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