

The Online Internet Addicts' [Support](#) Group

by J. C. Herz (copyright), in [Surfing on the Internet: A Nethead's Adventures Online](#), Little, Brown, and Co., 1995 (pp. 288-293)

It's 5 am, and I'm still on the Net. My eyes are unfocusing, and my mind's getting ready to do the same. I catch myself pulling a Stockdale: Who am I? What am I doing here? I'm in an official, extra-tasty catatonic daze, like Cindy Brady in the Game Show episode, when the red camera light goes on and she just stares and stares and stares at it. I compose talk show commercials and public service announcements in my head. "It started innocently enough. 'Kim' got a computer account in college and began experimenting with a vast computer network known as the Internet. Gradually, she became dependent on her daily fix, first a little bit, and then more every day. Soon, she was spending the wee hours of the morning plastered to her computer screen. Sleep and nutrition were relegated to scattered naps and the occasional Cup-o-Noodles. Her grades went out the window. She was ..." host pauses for dramatic effect "... an Internet Junkie. Join us next time, when we talk to netaholics." The sound effect from A Current Affair segues into...

"This is your brain." Picture of a potted gerber daisy. "This is your brain on Net." Picture of gerber daisy blossom garroted from its stem and tossed into a food processor with pickling brine, soap-bubble formula, and the contents of 42 pixie stix. Sound of food processor on high setting. "Any questions?" I sit, rapt, absorbed by a chilling QVC psychodrama. Lorena Bobbitt, having lashed Billy Idol to the kitchen sink with Topsy Tail hair tools, brandishes a Flowbie and threatens to dismember him for whorishly appropriating the term "cyberpunk." And after a few hours of mass media flotsam piped direct to my brain, a kind intellectual tinnitus sets in. This is the point when I sit back, my mind ringing with Blade Runner trivia, and ponder the ethics of nanotechnology experiments on household pets. I squint, rub my temples, and groan with the agony of mental indigestion. Aaarrghhhh, my brain hurts...

Dammit Jim! Log off Jim! Log off!

I rub my eyes until I see pink hearts, green clovers, yellow moons, purple stars, and blue diamonds. Time for a nice bowl of Lucky Charms, a few No Doz, and a little [IRC](#). I need help. I peep into Mudders Anonymous, just out of curiosity. I'm not a real hard-core mudder. But [MUDS](#) are the most intense stuff on the Net, and there are bound to be some real nutcases in MudAnon who make me look comparatively normal. I don't know whether MUDs are inherently more addictive than the rest of the Net or whether they just attract more addictive personalities. But I have known heroin addicts who are less dependent on smack than hardcore [MUD junkies](#) are on MUDs, MUCKs, [MUSH](#)es, and [MOO](#)s. "You wanna see addiction at its finest?" asks a MudAnon member. "Over the summer, this was my schedule:

- Wake up at 2 p.m. (sometimes later. No later than 5 p.m. though).
- Boil water.
- Hop on the MUD.
- Convert water into coffee.
- Play MUD for the rest of the day with occasional coffee break, possibly Cup O' Noodles.
- Continue playing MUD.
- Go to sleep at 6 a.m.

And the sad (happy!) thing is that there are many people like this on the MUD. Some people keep slightly different schedules, but there's an array of net addicts who play 12, 15, 20 hours/day."

MUD junkies are the worst. God, they're the walking dead. This, from someone who gets off the Usenet wire at 4 am. Yeah, I know it's a hedge: I'm not as far-gone as those IRC addicts. Oh no, I'll never be as lame as those mudders. It's just a few newsgroups. A few forums on MindVox. OK, so I spend time on IRC, too. I'm not into MUDS, I swear. Well, not heavily into them. It's a very casual thing. It's not like I MUD every day. I can stop anytime I want. I'm in control. Really.

It's a classic pot-and-kettle situation. Usenet news worms look down on IRC junkies look down on MUD-heads look down on people who MUD more than them. Welcome to the wonderful world of Internet 12-Step culture. Yes, I realize that it's an oxymoron to hash out my Net habit in an online forum. But at

least the people here know what I'm talking about, instead of asking, "*You're hooked on what?!?!'*" The Net's multi-flavored mind candy has its own set of acronyms, just like real-life brain snacks.

"Yeah, I've done IRC, MUD, MOO, MUSH...I started out with e-mail and then ... got into the heavy stuff." MudAnon is a kick, because there are always people there who spend more time on the Net than I do. And even those addicts know people who Net harder than they do. Everyone has some zombie acquaintance he can point to and say, "See, I'm not so bad."

There is, of course, considerable pressure to top the last guy's story. "Over the weekend, I saw the most amazing case of MUD addiction yet," types another MudAnon member. "One of the users at this site had been playing for sixteen hours that I know of. I stand in awe." Personally, I admire that kind of stamina, and so does everyone else, which is why Net junkie newsgroups walk a fine line between confession and braggadocio. Lately, they've been degenerating into all-out bragging sessions in heated ALL CAPS MODE:

YES, YOU ARE AN ADDICT YOU ALWAYS HAVE BEEN AND YOU ALWAYS WILL BE BUT I HAVE BEEN IRC-ING LONGER SO THAT MAKES ME MORE OF AN ADDICT HAHAHAAHHA!!!.

This is what happens when you hold a Wellness meeting in a crack house. To be fair, some netters post to these newsgroups in an honest effort to kick the habit. They really do want to reassert some measure of control over their leisure time and job performance. But most of us have seen too many 12-step melodramas and tabloid addiction scandals to take this whole "recovery" thing seriously:

"Net Junkie Bares All in Shocking Confession"

"Wired to Net, College Student Stays Awake for Solid Week"

"Sunlight? What's That?"

And besides, it's so much more fun to spoof clichéd support group rhetoric than to play it straight. So the typical online round-circle goes something like this:

"Oh i'm soooo glad i was told about this newsgroup. i need help. i know. i've been irc-ing for ... well ... almost four years now. i've had a variety of names and a variety of net boyfriends. i failed french my freshman year because i used to stay up until 5, 6, even 7 am ircing and then go to bed (and french was at 9). but i guess i beat the odds. i got my b.a. i'm going for my m.a. i'm still ircing (although it's gotten more addictive again). and i'm ok. i guess. it's just nice to know that people are out there who understand my problem without saying "you're addicted to WHAT?!?!?!'" i mean ... it was hard enough admitting my addiction to Pixy Stix. even Mountain Dew posed a problem. i got help. but IRC???? So ... hi. my name is Ilene "Murph" Rosenberg and i am ... *gulp* ... i am ... *sniff gulp* (you can do this girl) ... and i am ... *gulp* ... an IRC addict. thank you."

Another netter stands up (well, he types /me stands up)

"My name is synergy, and I am a ... a ... a Net Junkie - I admit it - I stay up all night and skip classes to be on the Net. It's good to be here with my fellow brothers and sisters who can help me in my time of need. :::*snort*::: The Net Rules!"

A veteran mudder takes the floor:

"I too am a mudder of old, though I've managed to remain mudfree for almost 5 months now. I know I'll always be a mudder, because it is a disease that I'll have to live with for the rest of my life. But I will stay clean! At least until the Marches of Antan reopens anyway! MUHAHAHAHA...."

Copyright J.C. Herz, 1995.

Support on the Web

- [Addicted 2 Words](#)
- [Addicted 2 Stuff](#)
- [You might be addicted to IRC if ...](#)
- [Weboholics Anonymous](#)
- [The day my 'puter crashed](#)

- [Online Resources of RECOVERY.ORG](#)
- [Dr. Kimberly Young's Center for Online Addiction](#)
- [AA Frannie's Links](#)

- [The Addiction Addiction](#), by [Howard Rheingold](#) in the [Atlantic Unbound](#) [9/9/99]
- [News - Can't Resist the Online Pull](#) [8/23/99]
- [News - Log on, Tune, Drop Out](#) [3/29/99]
- [News - Internet an addiction?](#) [8/15/97]
- [News - Warning: Internet can be habit forming](#) [1/14/97]
- [News - Addiction to the Net](#) [New York Times, mid-February 1995]

- [A debunking essay by Carlton](#), my [friend](#), of course .

Extree, extree!! Computer News!! Microsoft Source Code [revealed!!](#) Read the [Readme File](#) from Hell!! Sing along with Gilbert and Sullivan's updated [Newsgroup Personality](#)!! Learn [Net.flamage](#) from the masters!! Find out how to know when it is time to [reassess your relationship with your computer](#)!

Inveterate and unrepentant surfers may visit [Home Thoughts](#), [the Blake page](#), the [Boar Ring Page](#), or [The Reading Room](#) at the Phoenix Bar & Grille.

**Please feel free to send more resources to me, [Penn Hackney](#), at penn@att.net
or visit me at <http://penn.home.att.net/sitemap.htm>:
Tooling down the ISH on a moped,
With the wind in my hair.**
