

When You Can't Bear To Get Off The Couch; Take Your Neurosis On Line

There are over 200 cybertherapists who counsel patients over the net via e-mail and chat rooms. While these methods have advantages such as being less expensive and available whenever you wish, your shrink could be a dog, for all you know. The problem, of course, is that anyone with a modem and a PC can claim to be a web psychotherapist and credentials are tough to verify in cyberspace. But, even if the credentials are valid, as in my case-I answer questions on my own site www.SaneCrazy.com and a number of other sites-I readily admit that a cybertherapist cannot provide eye contact, body gesture, body language, voice intonation, or any of the other elements that go with a real relationship. Although on-line questions and answers may provide information, don't confuse the experience with genuine therapy. The value of web psychotherapy lies in its potential as a first step toward getting you to think about seeking "real" help.

The ultimate quick fix is the following true endorsement for a particular psychological therapy that shall remain nameless, promoting the notion of gain without pain: "Requiring virtually nothing in the way of personal interaction... (this)... therapy can by-pass all that tedious therapeutic business and zero in on the problem immediately at hand." If this kind of thinking catches on, we may also seek ways to by-pass other "tedious" aspects of life such going to work, raising children, getting an education, getting a job, paying mortgages, and paying taxes. Promotion of rapid remedies also encourages a reduction in vital but time consuming activities such as personal interaction. In the year 2000, the "quick fix" is literally at one's fingertips.

Addiction to virtual reality is on the rise. While all addictions have some qualities in common. Internet addiction is the most recent one sweeping the country. The technological age is in full force and human beings increasingly live in a self-made reality. There are over 1.7 trillion web sites available and the numbers are rapidly rising. Computer users are increasing by leaps-and-bounds, with those over fifty winning the gold medal for the most rapid increase. On the up side, the Net offers ways to learn and connect with each other that are

new and exciting. However, the down side is that for those who merely sit, point and click, real human connection is passing them by.

Porno sites are the Web's biggest lure. An estimated 2 million people are addicted to them. It is exciting to pretend to be any one you choose, or to act-out your every fantasy, alone in the dark. Studies indicate that many web surfers prefer surfing to sex. Not surprisingly, attributes of gender played out in cyberspace parallel the stereotypes men and women have in our society. Men tend to seek out dominance and sexual fantasy on-line, while women tend to seek out romance, friendship and support through their relationships formed in chat rooms. Shrinks sometimes say: "women have sex in order to talk, while men talk in order to have sex." The same gender differences appear to influence the underlying reasons for Internet addiction.

The paradox is that there is an increase of virtual Internet addiction groups and chat rooms, which keeps people on-line as they seek their cure. I am concerned about the false sense of communication "Webbers" can get. Therapists are now seeing individuals and families with hitherto unknown issues. While many may have increased eye-hand coordination, they appear clueless about real-time relating.

Warning: check out your own and your family's connection to the Internet. Have you or someone you care for become lost in cyberspace? "Yes," the computer is a wonderful tool. And, "Yes" it can connect you to old friends and help you to make new ones. But, is your sex life slipping? And is your relationship to the Net to blame?

Life is too hard to do alone,

Dr. D.
Dorree Lynn, PH.D.