

→ **CHAPTER 5**
SHARING GOALS (pages 134-135)
MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES PROJECTS (pag 136)

→ **BEFORE YOU START**

Do you play videogames?
 If so, how many hours a week?
 Are you an average user of sites
 like *Facebook*, *My Space*, *Ever
 Quest* or *Twitter*?

Cyber addiction

Is sitting glassy-eyed in front of a computer screen, endlessly surfing the net and playing online games a new kind of addiction?

Some experts believe that gadgets¹, gaming and the net are bringing out people's addictive tendencies and compulsive² Internet use is now seriously discussed as a diagnostic category. There is every chance that Internet Addiction Disorder will appear in the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), to be released in 2012.

Symptoms include patients thinking obsessively about being online. In extreme cases, relationships, work and personal hygiene can be neglected, even leading to unpleasant physical responses when internet access is denied.

But what is so attractive that it can make a man throw his life

away like that? Professor Mark Griffiths, a psychologist at the University of Nottingham who has been researching internet addiction since 1995, says that the Internet is a psychologically disinhibiting medium in which people reveal themselves emotionally far quicker than they do offline.

Griffiths recently conducted a survey of over 7000 gamers. Using World Health Organisation criteria for addiction, he found that 12 per cent had at least three signs of addictive behaviour. This is expected to rise as the internet's influence on our lives grows, and there are already reports of a number of game-related deaths.

Professor Scott Caplan of the University of Delaware, in the US,

researches problematic internet use concentrating instead on getting to the root causes. He says that the social uses of the internet appear to be particularly attractive to people who are lonely, socially anxious, and who lack social skills. People who have deficits in their social lives prefer online social interaction over face-to-face exchanges.

Britons' online behaviour can also have far more serious impacts on their offline lives, and some people end up at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Many patients are brought there because of obsessive gaming or internet use. The Adolescent Directorate at the clinic deals with adolescents from age 14 up to the early 20s with patterns of behaviour that would fit with descriptions of addiction.

Confessions of an addict

A case study. This is one woman's tale of how an addiction to online gaming took over her life. Sarah is a 22-year-old American woman who has experienced what she describes as an online gaming addiction.

I was given a copy of *World of Warcraft* by one of my girlfriends for my birthday. She knew I was way into gaming and logged onto chatrooms and forums, and she told me that this was a way I could combine those two things. I'd heard of *Warcraft* and had been meaning to play for a while, but I hadn't found the time until then, and this gave me a good excuse.

At first I thought it was okay, nothing special, but after a while I found I was thinking about playing whenever I was doing other things. It gets under your skin like that, without you knowing it. My character was a female warrior, nothing like me at all really, just somebody I wished I could look like. I think a lot of players do that, if they don't go the other way and use a dwarf or something. On Azeroth (the setting for *World of Warcraft*) I'd chosen a PvE (Player versus Environment) realm because I liked questing³.

The first thing I noticed after I really got into it was that I was tired a lot. I knew I was spending too long in-game, but how else are you going to improve, right? My girlfriend who had bought the game started to make jokes about how she'd ruined my life, and I laughed it off⁴, but I could tell she wasn't really joking. Even though it was a long time before I could admit I had a problem, I knew that something wasn't right. I had more friends in *Warcraft* than I did for real, and I preferred talking to them. The best moment of any day was when I completed a quest – that made me happier than anything else. I was even attracted to other players, and I sometimes flirted with them and suggest that we could meet up. That really embarrasses me now.

Before I stopped I was playing more than six hours a day, and I have a job too so there wasn't much time for anything else. I

used to spend all day at my job thinking about getting back online, and note down new things I could try in the game. My appearance suffered, because I was just eating in a hurry at the screen every night. My social life died a death.

In the end, when I stopped, I joined Gamers Anonymous and there are lots of guys there who have been through the same thing. They've been really great. I still think a lot about *Warcraft*, but I'm too scared to try playing again. I don't trust myself.

Adapted from *Focus* issue 204, July 2009

Notes

1. **gadgets**: small machines or devices which do something useful;
2. **compulsive**: difficult to control (irrefrenabile);
3. **questing**: searching for something;
4. **to laugh off**: to minimize the problem by making jokes about it.

→ EXERCISES

A Match each of the following headings with a paragraph in the article Cyber Addiction.

1. Professor Griffiths survey [.....]
2. Dangers of online behaviour in Britain [.....]
3. The root causes according to Professor Scott Caplan [.....]
4. Internet Addiction Disorder will soon become a diagnostic category [.....]
5. A disinhibiting medium [.....]
6. Major symptoms [.....]

B These are the notes a journalist made while interviewing Sarah. Put the ideas into the order in which they occur in her confession.

1. She liked questing and her chosen character was a female warrior. [.....]
2. Sarah started to play *Warcraft* when she got it as a birthday present [.....]
3. When she completed a quest she was really happier and she had more friends in *Warcraft* than in real life. [.....]
4. She stopped with the help of Gamers Anonymous [.....]
5. Then she started playing more than six hours a day and in the rest of the day her main thought was the game. [.....]

C Answer these questions.

1. Which are some of the major symptoms of cyber addiction?
2. Which symptoms made Sarah realize that playing was getting under her skin?
3. What makes the Internet so attractive according to Professor Griffiths?
4. What does Professor Scott Caplan say about the attraction of the social uses of the Internet?
5. What embarrasses Sarah?
6. Which new diagnostic category will appear in the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), to be released in 2012?

D Complete the following passage about mobile gadgets with the phrases in the box below.

given to the fear of being out of mobile phone contact - we carry with us - we rely on gadgets - an expert in behavioural addictions - only use it in an emergency - is contributing to addictive behaviour - I didn't like the idea

The fact that we're always connected
, and it's aided enormously by the mobile hardware that everywhere nowadays. BlackBerrys, pagers, handheld games consoles, iPods, media players – any trip on public transport reveals the extent to which
 to get by on a day-to-day basis. Nomophobia is the name

Professor Mark Griffiths is, and treats his own mobile warily. "I gave up my mobile for six years because
 that wherever I was somebody could contact me. I still have one, but now " he says.

E Does net addiction really exist? Tick YES or NO for each argument and be ready to justify your choice.

1. Internet addiction doesn't exist. (Y N)
2. Net addiction is a widely accepted disorder. (Y N)
3. New treatment centres are opening up all over the world. (Y N)
4. It is a compulsive behaviour like gaming and food addictions (Y N)
5. Even though people with problems use the net too much, they are not addicted (Y N)
6. According to psychologists the net is used: as a social replacement; to boost self-esteem; to satisfy sexual curiosity. (Y N)
7. The net is helpful for those who find social interaction difficult because it is an anxiety avoidance interaction. (Y N)
8. The net has become the main way we interface with the world when we are not face-to-face with it. (Y N)

Oral practice

- F With the help of the Internet, prepare an oral presentation of an internet addiction case with the title "Caught in the Net" and present it to the class. You can find out more about Internet addiction case studies and coping strategies at www.netaddiction.com**