Internet Addiction Essay, Research Paper

Slaves to the Machine: . Everyday millions of children and adults hurry home after school for the samereason. The reason is not to greet their parents or get a snack as one may think. Rather tosit down in front of a monitor, in order to indulge in the electronic interconnected wonders of the internet. The millions of chat rooms, online games, as well as informationsources can be found to be mesmerizing. This type of person may find him/herself”surfing” to one area of the net after another. Or they might even go to the same placesover again many times trying to master the infinitely complicated informationsuperhighway. These “slaves to the machine” are normal people just anyone else. Whatthey do not realize is that is that their hobby is potentially addictive, as well asdetrimental. Online services are creating a new generation of couch potatoes, or mousepotatoes. The excessively priced internet servers offer a whole realm of services to theusers. Slowly the unsuspecting browsers become dependent on the internet for everythingfrom research to meeting the people of their dreams. Users may send and receiveelectronic mail constantly throughout the day. In some instances users check theirelectronic mailbox from twenty to thirty times per day (Le). This compulsive need tocommunicate is not what is dangerous at all. The problem is much more serious in somecases. Even though there is something fundamentally wrong with checking the weatheronline instead of simply going outside, for example. Some people are skeptic about the idea of internet addiction, and suggest thatthose who are supposedly addicted simply need a life. As cited by Hamilton and Kalb, those who doubt internet addiction believe that those who are mentally weak are “makingan excuse for not having a life”(60). Some experts believe that the concern about internetaddiction is blown out of proportion(Hamilton and Kalb 61). They point out almosteverything that we as humans use has the potential to be considered addictive. Books,television, and movies are all capable of reducing contact, or making relationships withothers. This is a valid point, but does that make the effects of those other mediumsacceptable. Of course not, none of the skeptics would condone one who does nothing butstay home and watch movies or read. Any such actions would be socially unhealthy.There has never been a documented report of men or women who underwent withdrawalsymptoms form books of movies, like those who eliminated the internet from their lives.Another person who has done considerable research on internet addiction claims thatinternet addiction is purely psychological. In other words the concept is” likepathological gambling: an enjoyable thing to do to such an extent that it interferes withthe rest of one’s life.”(Brenner 1) If internet use is like pathological gambling, the why arethere such extreme withdrawal effects? Other purely psychological addictions have fewor no withdrawal symptoms. Some of these “cyber-addicts” are unable to stop on their own free will. One stay-home mother spent up to eighteen hours a day online. She ran up four-hundred dollarsmonthly on the family phone bill. Then, after being scolded by her husband, sheproceeded to hire a computer hacker to get her free hours so as not to be noticed by herfamily (Hamilton, 60). These secret surfers are present in other ways as well. One manadmits to doing most of his surfing “late at night, when my wife and kids are asleep.”(Le)Going to such extents to surf the net seems to point to a very obvious problem. Thatproblem being that one with an internet addiction “has no sense of social risk, noguarantee of anything actually being true, and having no real physical humancontact.”(Brenner 1) Addiction to the internet is a growing problem in today’s society. There has beenestimations by “experts” that approx. two-hundred-thousand of the estimated 8.6 millioninternet customers are in fact addicted (Hamilton, 60). In some instances the dependencyis quite serious. When some addicts are not allowed access to the internet theconsequences can be quite severe. One boy “has cold sweats and nightmares…. He’d cryfor it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark,… his hands clawed to the bed slab,….trying to reach the console that wasn’t there.” He missed life online just as if it were aparent or a relative (Kidd). Seventeen-year-old Zachary Loafman says, “I’m going to killmyself,” whose problem caused him to distant himself from family and friends. Hisinternet addiction then had him lying in order to get online, and eventually hospitalizedfor serious depression (Le).Of course these are some very extreme cases, and most of thecases are not of this caliber. For example, other symptoms of withdrawal include “psychomotor agitation, anxiety, obsessive thinking about what is happening on theinternet, fantasies about the internet, and voluntary or involuntary typing movements ofthe fingers(Goldberg 1).” These mild symptoms can nonetheless interfere with one’sconcentration in the workplace, at school, or during any other time that thought process isrequired. To take care of these or other symptoms the addict has to use the internet(Goldberg 1). One may inquire as to why the internet can be so addictive. What is it about aningenious information source that can cause one to change his or her life. In most casesthe net inspires an unparalleled feeling of freedom in the addicted user. One seescyberspace as “another realm to be explored, where the limits on their abilities arefew.”(Kidd) When such freedom is taken away from an addict the effect is multiplied asif they had been confined to a cage. The net offers others an ” escape for their

uninteresting or miserable lives” (Le). Getting to know others by means of the internetkeeps one from having to be judged from the outside. Thus, people find it easier to fullyexpress themselves online. There they can be appreciated for being” warm, clever, andfunny…” or in other words, noticed for their personality and not their outwardappearance(Le). Internet addiction shares many symptoms as substance addictions such as alcohol,gambling, or even drugs. Experts now call this phenomenon Internet Addiction Disorder,or IAD. Mental health experts currently ignore it since the cases have been so recent (Le).Just as alcoholics begin to require more alcohol steadily, sufferers of IAD “acquire andincreasingly high tolerance for the net”(Le). Also the user feels continuously decreasingeffect after being online for the same amount of time(Goldberg 1). This effect is whatleads to the dependency that the addicts experience. The need of addict for increasingamounts of time could be in part of the fact that there is always something new on theinternet. The more things that there are to surf the more intrigued the user becomes. Toan addict, getting online is always priority. Soon it starts to interfere with their daily lifeas well as other things. Now it seems all right to stay up later to be online, or neglectstudies in order to surf. There are even students who use multiple accounts to get aroundweekly online time limits at college (Le). One student whose free time goes solely to thenet admits,” I always make promises to quit, but you cannot quit cold-turkey.”(Le) Anaddict usually ends up using the internet for longer than was originally intended. Onemay go online to find research material, and end up in a chat room or elsewhere on thenet for hours on end. Often times a person may try several time unsuccessfully to cutdown time on the internet. The daily life of an addict is effected in other ways as well.They may engage in other activities related to the internet “(buying internet relatedbooks, trying out new WWW browsers, researching internet browsers, and organizingfiles of downloaded materials). Even though one who is addicted to the internet mayknow that they have a problem they continue to use the internet (Goldberg1-2). One whosuspects that they may have an internet addiction is more than likely correct. Surveyshave shown that in many cases others have told the user that they have a problem(Brenner 1). Apparently there is hope for those who have an internet addiction problems.Kathy Rutkowsky revealed aspects of her life before and after she had an internetaddiction. One night she just turned off her computer and left it that way for a while. Sherecalls feeling ” instantly liberated.” From then on she had opportunities to enjoyspending time with her family. While off the net she read whole books and wrote anentire play, and had time to daydream as well as walk the family dog. She found thefreedom from staring at her computer screen so overwhelming that she consideredremaining away from the internet forever. Kathy recognizes that the zealousness of herpersonality was partly responsible for her previous addiction. Seemingly ironic, she didnot remain off the web indefinitely. She had in fact met real friends on the net that shewished to keep in touch with. There was also a whole realm of information that shewould not be exposed to without the internet. So now she has challenged herself to usethe internet responsibly (Rutkowsky 1). Another previously addicted man wrote a bookafter pulling the plug on the internet. He stresses that it is the responsibility of humanbeings to control technology, and not to let it take control of their lives as the internet didhis. This thought goes for all things that people are dependent on like air conditioning,television, or fast food.(Stoll 66) It might be beneficial to other internet addicts to read the account of KathyRutkowsky. One might infer that the only valid way for an internet addict to get help is tohelp themselves. Obviously for one to be relieved of an internet addiction one mustdesire help for his/ her self. Without willing to help oneself, the desire to do so isrendered null and void. The feeling of liberation expressed by Rutkowsky after quittinguse of the internet should be something of an archetype of incentive for others whomsuffer from internet addiction. Not everyone who uses the internet becomes addicted. Having too many otherprior responsibilities may play a part in why one does not become an addict. That is tosay that often a person just plain does not have time to get addicted. Finding the internetexiting is also a matter of personal preference. Some users may try surfing the net andbecome bored, and never wish to log on again. Others may have seen something on thenet that they found offensive, which is always possible considering the free speech that iswidely taken advantage of on the internet. Ironically the only places where these addicts can go for help are located on theinternet. “It’s like that joke about Alcoholics Anonymous meetings being held inbars.”(Le) One person started a web abusers site on the net after seeing two friend’sacademic standings “go down the drain”(Hamilton 60) The concept of getting help for aweb addiction on the internet sheds new light on the clich “fighting fire with fire”. Or inother words it is just plain ridiculous. There still needs to be a treatment developed forthose who are entangled in the web. If addicts are unwilling to attempt to just use theirown free will to quit, then there needs to be a plan to aid in recovery. Not help online, butactual counseling that focuses on replacing the aspects in peoples lives that seem to besustained by being on the web. That is in other words a way to bring the hapoiness thatthey feel online to the real world offline. Otherwise the helpless addicts will continue towaste their money as well as their lives spending endless hours searching cyberspace inorder to remain fulfilled.