IS THE ONSLAUGHT MAKING US CRAZY?

BY
TONY DOKOUPIL
Before he launched the most viral video in Internet history, Jason Russell was a half-hearted Web presence. His YouTube account was dead, and his Facebook and Twitter pages were a trickle of kid pictures and home-garden updates. The Web wasn’t made “to keep track of how much people like us,” he thought, and when his own tech habits made him feel like “a genius, an addict, or a megalomaniac,” he unplugged for days, believing, as the humorist Andy Borowitz put it in a tweet that Russell tagged as a favorite, “It’s important to turn off our computers and do things in the real world.”

But this past March Russell struggled to turn off anything. He forwarded a link to “Kony 2012,” his deeply personal Web documentary about the African warlord Joseph Kony. The idea was to use social media to make Kony famous as the first step to stopping his crimes. And it seemed to work: the film hurtled through cyberspace, clocking more than 70 million views in less than a week. But something happened to Russell in the process. The same digital tools that supported his mission seemed to tear at his psyche, exposing him to nonstop slurs and criticisms, and ending his arm’s-length relationship with new media.

He slept two hours in the first four days, producing a swirl of bizarre Twitter updates. He sent a link to “I Met the Walrus,” a short animated interview with John Lennon, urging followers to “start training your mind.” He sent a picture of his tattoo, TIMSHEL, a biblical word about man’s choice between good and evil. At one point he uploaded and commented on a digital photo of a text message from his mother. At another he compared his life to the mind-bending movie Inception, “a dream inside a dream.”

On the eighth day of his strange, 21st-century vortex, he sent a final tweet—a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.: “If you can’t fly, then run, if you can’t run, then walk, if you can’t walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward”—and walked back into the real world. He took off his clothes and went to the corner of a busy intersection near his home in San Diego, where he repeatedly slapped the concrete with both palms and ranted about the devil. This too became a viral video.

Afterward Russell was diagnosed with “reactive psychosis,” a form of temporary insanity. It had nothing to do with drugs or alcohol, his wife, Danica, stressed in a blog post, and everything to do with the machine that kept Russell connected even as he was breaking apart. “Though new to us,” Danica continued, “doctors say this is a common experience.” Given Russell’s “sudden transition from relative anonymity to worldwide attention—both raves and ridicules.”

More than four months later, Jason is out of the hospital, his company says, but he is still in recovery. His wife took a “month of silence” on Twitter. Jason’s social-media accounts remain dark.

Questions about the Internet’s deleterious effects on the mind are at least as old as hyperlinks. But even among Web skeptics, the idea that a new technology might influence how we think and feel—alone contribute to a great American crack-up—was considered silly and naive, like waving a cane at electric light or blaming the television for kids these days. Instead, the Internet was seen as just another medium, a delivery system, not a diabolical machine. It made people happier and more productive. And where was the proof otherwise?

Now, however, the proof is starting to pile up. The first good, peer-reviewed research is emerging, and the picture is much gloomier than the trumpet blasts of Web utopians have allowed. The current incarnation of the Internet—portable, social, accelerated, and all-pervasive—may be making us not just dumber or lonelier but more depressed and anxious, prone to obsessive-compulsive and attention-deficit disorders, even outright psychotic. Our digitized minds can scan like those of drug addicts, and normal people are breaking down in sad and seemingly new ways.

In the summer of 1996, seven young researchers at MIT blurred the lines between man and computer, living simultaneously in the physical and virtual worlds. They carried keyboards in their pockets, radio-transmitters in their backpacks, and a clip-on screen in front of their eyes. They called themselves “cyborgs”—and they were freaks. But

The average teen processes an astounding 3,700 texts a month.
Doctors blamed filmmaker Jason Russell's mental breakdown on his online blitz.

As Sherry Turkle, a psychologist at MIT, points out, "we are all cyborgs now." This life of continuous connection has come to seem normal, but that's not the same as saying that it's healthy or sustainable, as technology—to paraphrase the old line about alcohol—becomes the cause of and solution to all life's problems.

In less than the span of a single childhood, Americans have merged with their machines, staring at a screen for at least eight hours a day, more time than we spend on any other activity including sleeping. Teens fit some seven hours of screen time into the average school day; 11, if you count time spent multitasking on several devices. When President Obama last ran for office, the iPhone had yet to be launched. Now smartphones outnumber the old models in America, and more than a third of users get online before getting out of bed.

Meanwhile, texting has become like blinking: the average person, regardless of age, sends or receives about 400 texts a month, four times the 2007 number. The average teen processes an astounding 3,700 texts a month, double the 2007 figure. And more than two thirds of these normal, everyday cyborgs, myself included, report feeling their phone vibrate when in fact nothing is happening. Researchers call it "phantom-vibration syndrome."

Altogether the digital shifts of the last five years call to mind a horse that has sprinted out from underneath its rider, dragging the person who once held the reins. No one is arguing for some kind of Amish future. But the research is now making it clear that the Internet is not "just" another delivery system. It is creating a whole new mental environment, a digital state of nature where the human mind becomes a spinning instrument panel, and few people will survive unscathed.

"This is an issue as important and unprecedented as climate change," says Susan Greenfield, a pharmacology professor at Oxford University who is working on a book about how digital culture is rewiring us—and not for the better. "We could create the most wonderful world for our kids but that's not going to happen if we're in denial and people sleepwalk into these technologies and end up glass-eyed zombies."

Does the Internet make us crazy? Not the technology itself or the content, no. But a Newsweek review of findings from more than a dozen countries finds the answers pointing in a similar direction. Peter Whybrow, the director of the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA, argues that "the computer is like electronic cocaine," fueling cycles of mania followed by depressive stretches. The Internet "leads to behavior that people are conscious is not in their best interest and does leave them anxious and does make them act compulsively," says Nicholas Carr, whose book "The Shallows: about the Web's effect on cognition" was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. It "fosters our obsessions, dependence, and stress reactions," adds Larry Rosen, a California psychologist who has researched the Net's effect for decades. It "encourages—and even promotes—insanity."

Fear that the Internet and mobile technology contributes to addiction—not to mention the often related ADHD and OCD disorders—has persisted for decades, but for most of that time the naysayers prevailed, often pugilistically. "What's next? Microwave abuse and Chapstick addiction?" wrote a peer reviewer for one of the leading psychiatric journals, rejecting a national study of problematic Internet use in 2006. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders has never included a category of machine-human interactions. But that view is suddenly on the outs. When the new DSM is released next year, Internet Addiction Disorder will be included for the first time, albeit in an appendix tagged for "further study." China, Taiwan, and Korea recently accepted the diagnosis, and began treating problematic Web use as a grave national health crisis. In those countries, where tens of millions of people (and as much as 30 percent of teens) are considered Internet-addicted, mostly to gaming, virtual reality, and social media, the story is sensational front-page news. One young couple neglected its infant to death while nourishing a virtual baby online. A young man fatally bludgeoned his mother for suggesting he log off (and then used her credit card to rack up more hours). At least 10 ultra-Web users, serviced by one-click noodle delivery, have died of blood clots from sitting too long.

Now the Korean government is funding
that one in 10 users feels “fully addicted” to his or her phone. All but 6 percent of the sample admitted some level of compulsion, while 3 percent won’t let anyone else touch their phones.

In the two years since, concern over the Web’s pathological stickiness has only intensified. In April, doctors told The Times of India about an anecdotal uptick in “Facebook addiction.” The latest details of America’s Web obsession are found in Larry Rosen’s new book, Disorder, which, despite the hucksterish title, comes with the imprimatur of the world’s largest academic publisher. His team surveyed 750 people, a spread of teens and adults who represented the Southern California census, detailing their tech habits, their feelings about those habits, and their scores on a series of standard tests of

to get it. But in fact these users don’t exactly want to be so connected. It’s not quite free choice that drives most young corporate employees (45 and under) to keep their BlackBerrys in the bedroom within arms’ reach, per a 2011 study, or free choice, per another 2011 study, that makes 80 percent of vacationers bring along laptops or smartphones so they can check in with work while away; or free choice that leads smartphone users to check their phones before bed, in the middle of the night, if they stir, and within minutes of waking up.

We may appear to be choosing to use this technology, but in fact we are being dragged to it by the potential of short-term rewards. Every ping could be social, sexual, or professional opportunity, and we get a mini-reward, a squirt of dopamine, for answering the bell. “These rewards serve as jolts of energy that re-charge the compulsion engine, much like the frisson a gambler receives as a new card hits the table,” MIT media scholar Judith Donath recently told Scientific American. “Cumulatively, the effect is potent and hard to resist.”

Recently it became possible to watch this kind of Web use rewire the brain. In 2008 Gary Small, the head of UCLA’s Memory and Aging Research Center, was the first to document changes in the brain as a result of even moderate Internet use. He rounded up 24 people, half of them experienced Web users, half of them newbies, and he passed them each through a brain scanner. The difference was striking, with the Web users displaying fundamentally altered neural circuits, but the real surprise was what happened next. The novices went away for a week, and were asked to spend a total of five hours online and then return for another scan. “The naive subjects had already re-wired their brains,” he later wrote, missing darkly about what might happen when we spend more time online.

The brains of Internet addicts, it turns out, look like the brains of drug and alcohol addicts. In a study published in January, Chinese researchers found “abnormal white matter” essentially extra nerve cells built for speed in the areas charged with attention, control, and executive function. A parallel study found similar changes in the brains of videogame addicts. And both studies come on the heels of other Chinese results that link internet addiction to “structural abnormalities in psychiatric disorders. He found that most respondents, with the exception of those over the age of 50, check text messages, email or their social network “all the time” or “every 15 minutes.” More worryingly, he also found that those who spent more time online had more “compulsive personality traits.”

Perhaps not that surprising: those who want the most time online feel compelled

A third of smartphone users go online before getting out of bed.
The brains of Internet addicts scan a lot like the brains of drug and alcohol addicts.

gray matter," namely shrinkage of 10 to 20 percent in the area of the brain responsible for processing of speech, memory, motor control, emotion, sensory, and other information. And worse, the shrinkage never stopped: the more time online, the more the brain showed signs of "atrophy."

While brain scans don't reveal which came first, the abuse or the brain changes, many clinicians feel their own observations confirmed. "There's little doubt we're becoming more impulsive," says Stanford's Abi-Mosleh, and one reason for this is technology use. He points to the rise in OCD and ADHD diagnoses, both of which have risen 60 percent in the last decade. "There's a cause and effect."

And don't kid yourself: the gap between an "Internet addict" and John Q. Public is thin to nonexistent. One of the early flags for addiction was spending more than 38 hours a week online. At that point, we are all addicts now, many of us by Wednesday afternoon. Tuesday if it's a busy week. A recent American study based on data from adolescent Web use in the 1990s found a connection between time online and mood disorders in young adulthood. Chinese researchers have similarly found a "direct effect" between heavy Net use and the development of "illness depression," while scholars at Case Western Reserve University correlated heavy texting and social media use with "stress, depression, and suicidal thinking."

In response to this work, an article in the journal Pediatrics noted the rise of "a new phenomenon called 'Facebook depression,'" and explained that "the intensity of the online world may trigger depression." Doctors, according to the report published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, should work digital usage questions into every annual checkup.

Rosen, the author of this book, points to a preponderance of research showing "a link between Internet use, instant messaging, emailing, chatting, and depression among adolescents," as well as to the "strong relationships between video gaming and depression." But the problem seems to be as much as quality: bad internet social experiences so common online can lead to these potential spirals of despair.
For her book *Alone Together*, MIT psychologist Sherry Turkle interviewed more than 450 people, most of them in their teens and 20s, about their lives online. And while she's the author of two prior tech-positive books, and once graced the cover of *Wired* magazine, she now reveals a sad, stressed-out world of people coated in Dorito dust and locked in a dystopian relationship with their machines.

People tell her that their phones and laptops are the “place for hope” in their lives, the “place where sweetness comes from.” Children describe mothers and fathers unavailable in profound ways, present and yet not there at all. “Mothers are now breastfeeding and bottle-feeding their babies as they text,” she told the American Psychological Association last summer. “A mother made tense by text messages is going to be experienced as tense by the child. And that child is vulnerable to interpreting that tension as coming from within the relationship with the mother. This is something that needs to be watched very closely.” She added, “Technology can make us forget important things we know about life.”

This evaporation of the genuine self also occurred among the high-school- and college-age kids she interviewed. They were struggling with digital identities at an age when actual identity is in flux. “What I learned in high school,” a kid named Stan told Turkle, “was profiles, profiles, profiles: how to make a me.” It’s a nerve-racking learning curve, a life lived entirely in public with the webcam on, every mistake recorded and shared, mocked until something more mockable comes along. “How long do I have to do this?” another teen sighed, as he prepared to reply to 100 new messages on his phone.

Last year, when MTV polled its 13- to 30-year-old viewers on their Web habits, most felt “defined” by what they put online, “exhausted” by always having to be putting it out there, and utterly unable to look away for fear of missing out. “FOMO,” the network called it. “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by sadness, starving hysterical naked,” begins Allen Ginsberg’s poem *Howl*, a beatnik rant that opens with people “dragging themselves” at dawn, scurrying for an “angry fix” of heroin. It’s not hard to imagine the alternative imagery today.

The latest Net-and-depression study may be the saddest one of all. With consent of the subjects, Missouri State Uni-

versity tracked the real-time Web habits of 216 kids, 30 percent of whom showed signs of depression. The results, published last month, found that the depressed kids were the most intense Web users, chewing on more than 100 hours of email, chat, videogames, and file sharing. They also opened, closed, and switched browser windows more frequently, searching, one imagines, and not finding what they hoped to find.

They each sound like Doug, a Midwestern college student who maintained four avatars, keeping each virtual world open on his computer, along with his school work, email, and favorite videogames. He told Turkle that his real life is “just another window”—and “usually not my best one.” Where is this headed? She wonders. That’s the saddest line of inquiry of all.

RECENTLY, SCHOLARS have begun to suggest that our digitized world may support even more extreme forms of mental illness. At Stanford, Dr. Aboujaoude is studying whether some digital selves should be counted as a legitimate, pathological “alter of sorts,” like the alter egos documented in cases of multiple personality disorder (now called dissociative identity disorder in the DSM). To test his idea, he gave one of his patients, Richard, a mild-mannered human-resources executive with a ruthless Web poker habit, the official test for multiple personality disorder. The result was startling. He scored as high as patient zero. “I might as well have been ... administering the questionnaire to Sybil Dorsett!” Aboujaoude writes.

The Gold brothers—Joel, a psychiatrist at New York University, and Ian, a philosopher and psychiatrist at McGill University—are investigating technology’s potential to sever people’s ties with reality, fueling hallucinations, delusions, and genuine psychosis, much as it seemed to do in the case of Jason Russell, the filmmaker behind “Kony 2012.” The idea is that online life is akin to life in the biggest city, stitched and sutured together by cables and modems, but not less mentally real—and taxing—than New York or Hong Kong. “The data clearly support the view that someone who lives in a big city is at higher risk of psychosis than someone in a small town,” Ian Gold wrote in email.

“*If the Internet is a kind of imaginary city,”* he continues. “It might have some of the same psychological impact.”

A team of researchers at Tel Aviv University is following a similar path. Last year, they published what they believe are the first documented cases of “Internet-related psychosis.” The qualities of online communication are capable of generating “true psychotic phenomena,” the authors conclude, before putting the medical community on warning. “The spiraling use of the Internet and its potential involvement in psychopathology are new consequences of our times.”

So what do we do about it? Some would say nothing, since even the best research is tangled in the timeless conundrum of what comes first. Does the medium break normal people with its unrelenting presence, endless distractions, and threat of public ridicule for missteps? Or does it attract broken souls?

But in a way, it doesn’t matter whether our digital intensity is causing mental illness, or simply encouraging it along, as long as people are suffering. Overwhelmed by the velocity of their lives, we turn to prescription drugs, which helps explain why America runs on Xanax (and why rehab admissions for benzodiazepines, the ingredient in Xanax and other anti-anxiety drugs, have tripled since the late 1990s). We also spring for the false rescue of multitasking, which saps attention even when the computer is off. And all of us, since the relationship with the Internet began, have tended to accept it as is, without much conscious thought about how we want it to be or what we want to avoid. Those days of complacency should end. The Internet is still ours to shape. Our minds are in the balance.
GRAY MATTER

CAN you remember the last time you were in a public space in America and didn’t notice that half the people around you were bent over a digital screen, thumbing a connection to somewhere else?

Most of us are well aware of the convenience that instant electronic access provides. Less has been said about the costs. Research that my colleagues and I have just completed, to be published in a forthcoming issue of Psychological Science, suggests that one measurable toll may be on our biological capacity to connect with other people.

Our ingrained habits change us. Neurons that fire together, wire together, neuroscientists like to say, reflecting the increasing evidence that experiences leave imprints on our neural pathways, a phenomenon called neuroplasticity. Any habit molds the very structure of your brain in ways that strengthen your proclivity for that habit.

Plasticity, the propensity to be shaped by experience, isn’t limited to the brain. You already know that when you lead a sedentary life, your muscles atrophy to diminish your physical strength. What you may not know is that your habits of social connection also leave their own physical imprint on you.

How much time do you typically spend with others? And when you do, how connected and attuned to them do you feel? Your answers to these simple questions may well reveal your biological capacity to connect.

My research team and I conducted a longitudinal field experiment on the effects of learning skills for cultivating warmer interpersonal connections in daily life. Half the participants,
phone than their child — leave life-limiting fingerprints on their and their children’s gene expression.

When you share a smile or laugh with someone face to face, a discernible synchrony emerges between you, as your gestures and biochemistries, even your respective neural firings, come to mirror each other. It’s micro-moments like these, in which a wave of good feeling rolls through two brains and bodies at once, that build your capacity to empathize as well as to improve your health.

If you don’t regularly exercise this capacity, it withers. Lucky for us, connecting with others does good and feels good, and opportunities to do so abound.

So the next time you see a friend, or a child, spending too much of their day facing a screen, extend a hand and invite him back to the world of real social encounters. You’ll not only build up his health and empathic skills, but yours as well. Friends don’t let friends lose their capacity for humanity.

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KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING AND CULTIVATING RESILIENCY

Resilient people thrive in constant change, are flexible, and adapt to new circumstances easily. Most importantly, they expect to bounce back from difficult and painful experiences and feel confident they will. They are adept at seeing things from another’s point of view—they can empathize with others causing them to feel less alone and less entrenched in their own pain. We can cultivate resiliency by shifting how we think about adversity. This shift profoundly and positively affects the degree of happiness we will experience in our lives.

Here are several suggestions to develop a resilient attitude:

1. Accept that everyone will experience painful and difficult challenges—these challenges are built into the very fabric of life. This acceptance can decrease our sense of entitlement and a personal sense of victimization.

2. Practice seeing life’s painful events, not as fixed and unchangeable (this keeps us stuck in pain affecting our physical, emotional, and psychological health). Viewing negative events as temporary and subject to our influence, allow us to positively influence our experience of these difficult situations.

3. Resilient people mourn losses and experience frustrations but find redeeming potential or value in life’s challenges and experience some hope and positive emotions. When less resilient people face difficulties, all of their emotions turn negative. If things are good, they feel good, if things are bad, they feel terrible. To change they must examine their self-talk that blocks seeing a “silver lining”. You can build a “resiliency reservoir” to draw from in difficult
times through a daily gratitude journal where we notice and appreciate at least three positive experiences each day.

4. Cultivate seeing life’s difficult and even tragic moments as opportunities for growth, learning, and effective problem solving. What is the Universe trying to teach me? What is useful here? What are my best available choices?

5. Tragic and challenging events are an opportunity to open our hearts and look for ways to be of service to others. This lightens the pain increased by our self-absorption. Research shows people who have just engaged in an act of kindness use that serotonin (the neurotransmitter associated with well-being) more efficiently.

6. Take care of yourself. Healthy regulation of the Four Primitive Urges (Hunger, Sleep, Sex, and Self-Preservation) provides the energy, physical strength, emotional balance, and a healthy sense of Self—necessary for maintaining a resilient attitude. Periodic mental breaks throughout the day including exercise, spending time in nature, surrounding yourself with caring people, relaxation/breathing exercises, and meditation have been proven to improve health, increase energy, and decrease emotional reactivity—all critical to maintaining a pleasant and contented mind with a resilient attitude.

7. Maintain your humor in the midst of adversity.
4 Practical Benefits of Meditation

Light of the Spirit Monastery

_Here are four scientific reports about the practical benefits of meditation, the first three being about Breath Meditation specifically:_

1. “Everyone around the water cooler knows that meditation reduces stress.

But with the aid of advanced brain-scanning technology, researchers are beginning to show that meditation directly affects the function and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus and improve memory. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain’s cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of twenty men and women who meditated for just forty minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not....What’s more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age.” ( _How to Get Smarter, One Breath At A Time_ , Lisa Takeuchi Cullen. _Time_ , January 16, 2006, p. 93.)

2. “In a study published in the journal NeuroImage, researchers report that certain regions in the brains of long-term meditators were larger than in a similar control group.

“Specifically, meditators showed significantly larger volumes of the hippocampus and areas within the orbito-frontal cortex, the thalamus and the inferior temporal gyrus—all regions known for regulating emotions.

“‘We know that people who consistently meditate have a singular ability to cultivate positive emotions, retain emotional stability and engage in mindful behavior,’ said Eileen Luders, lead author and a postdoctoral research fellow at the UCLA Laboratory of Neuro Imaging. ‘The observed differences in brain anatomy might give us a clue why meditators have these exceptional abilities.’

‘Research has confirmed the beneficial aspects of meditation. In addition to having
into meditation in the first place.

"Since this type of meditation counteracts the natural thinning of the thinking surface of the brain, could it play a role in slowing—even reversing—aging? That could really be mind-boggling in the most positive sense." (PhysOrg—January 31, 2006. Harvard University. William J. Cromie.)

Another report on this study in the New Scientist, titled “Meditation Builds Up the Brain,” says that “meditating actually increases the thickness of the cortex in areas involved in attention and sensory processing, such as the prefrontal cortex and the right anterior insula.

“You are exercising it while you meditate, and it gets bigger,” she [Sara Lazar] says.... It is further evidence, says Lazar, that yogis ‘aren’t just sitting there doing nothing.’”

4. “There was a study reported at the American Geriatric Association convention in 1979 involving forty-seven participants whose average age was 52.5 years. It found that people who had been meditating more than seven years were approximately twelve years younger physiologically than those of the same chronological age who were not meditating.” (Gabriel Cousens, M.D., Conscious Eating, p. 281.)

More on Meditation:

- What is Yoga?
- Seven Signs of Progress in Meditation, by Paramhansa Yogananda

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BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

We are seeing more people who fit this profile so I thought it would give you a brief summary of the etiology as well as a list of the characteristics often associated with this disorder.

This disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of instability in regulating ones emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and interpersonal domains. Relationships are frequently chaotic frequently consisting of alternating between idealization or devaluation of the other person. Usually a history of neglect, abuse, attachment problems or tremendous instability in the family system create the symptoms associated with this disorder. The most prevalent symptoms that cluster around the underlying abandonment fear are:

1. Incredible impulsivity (may be born of the fear that there needs might not be met).
2. Black and White categorization—you are either all good or all bad.
3. Frantic efforts to avoid abandonment or preemptive strikes to push people away so they can verify their reality (people aren’t here for me)—thus also gaining some control over their fear. (“I hate you, don’t leave me” reflects this ambiguity).
4. Tremendous difficulty with trust.
5. Unstable sense of self—they are whoever they are with.
6. Self Injurious behavior—cutters, suicidal threats or gestures, alcohol and drug use, eating disorders, gambling, shoplifting.
7. Incredibly sensitive to criticism—THEREFORE SARCASM IS COUNTERINDICATED
8. Anger and Rage—males are often very narcissistic.
9. Hate being alone.
10. Underlying sense of emptiness.

11. Poor boundaries—promiscuity—fall in love in two days, lack of respect for self and others, a sense of injustice toward any perceived indiscretion—even if it doesn’t involve them.

These are some of the most difficult students to work with because of the enormous abandonment issues, anger, acting out behaviors and the negligible progress as well as their ability to push our buttons. When working with Borderlines here are a few suggestions:

1. When they are emotionally unstable or “emoting” allow them to express their pain and frustration and validate their pain. This does not mean that we don’t set limits but, we have to get behind their anger to the hurt and acknowledge that. You can acknowledge their pain without agreeing to their reality. Also the use of a “time out” that they have agreed to is important—they might benefit from journaling their feelings and then problem solving.
2. Long term, building trust and a relationship is a prerequisite to “nudging” them toward more functional behavior.
3. Working to maintain ones neutrality (in tone and gesture) is helpful, though one should have no expectation that they will immediately “soften”.