

STATISTICS

Sex, Lies and Gluttony

Percentage of Americans who believe lying is sometimes necessary:

60

Percentage who admit to lying on their taxes or an office expense account:

15

Percentage of Americans who disapprove of extramarital relationships:

90

Percentage of women and men, respectively, who cheat on their spouse:

35, 45

Percentage of Americans who believe people who have children lead richer lives:

63

Percentage decline of pregnancies in the United States between 1990 and 1996:

9

Percentage of Americans who think they weigh too much:

46

Percentage who are clinically overweight:

54

SOURCES: *The Way We Live Now Poll, The New York Times; American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy; National Center for Health Statistics; Centers for Disease Control*

METHODS

Catch The Beat

If you and your co-workers lack team spirit, try forming a drum circle: Recent research shows that group drumming can improve mood and create unity.

While hiking in Hawaii in 1995, Charles Kaplan, a young Ph.D. candidate in psychology, joined a group of locals in an evening drum circle. As he found a seat—and the

beat—within the group, he felt his mood improving rapidly, and watched the primal act of drumming draw the group together.

Back at the University of Connecticut, Kaplan's dissertation focused on the effects of small group hand drumming on mood, energy level and group dynamics. "When I discovered the tremendous power of group drumming, I felt that it would be an excellent way to influence people in a positive and participatory way," he explains.

ADDICTION

Hooked On The 'Net

Over 44 million families are online, and over half of their members—about 25 million people—may qualify as compulsive surfers. So is "Internet Addiction" a new psychological phenomenon?

In a study published recently in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, researchers from the University of Florida (UF) and the University of Cincinnati examined the habits of 20 people who had spent more than 30 nonworking hours a week online for

The evidence points to a psychological disorder, so researchers probed further and found that the participants' habits met the criteria for impulse control disorders, mental illnesses characterized by an uncontrollable desire to perform a behavior that, once executed, is often followed by a huge sense of relief. And most of the participants had a history of additional psychiatric problems like eating disorders and manic depression.

Despite their apparent sufferings, the study's participants were not easily identifiable, says Nathan Shapira, Ph.D., a UF assistant psychiatry professor and co-author of the study. "These people were intelligent, well-respected community members," he says. "They were like your next-door neighbor—who just lost control."

Given the confounding nature of the participants' various symptoms, Shapira believes the essential issue remains: Is Internet "addiction" a distinct disorder or a symptom of another well-defined disorder? "It's too early to know," he says. "But my sense is that this problem is going to get worse as the size and speed of the Internet increases."

—Heather Holliday



the past three years. The participants described skipping sleep, ignoring family responsibilities, and showing up late for work to fulfill their desire to visit chat rooms and surf the Web. The consequences were severe: Many suffered from marital problems, failed in school or lost a job, and accumulated debt.

Kaplan divided 304 participants into six drumming groups, then compared changes in their mood and levels of social interaction to those of groups engaged in other tasks. He found that the drummers were significantly more elated, less depressed, and talked about deeper issues during the shared activity. Drummers also reported feeling more energetic, composed and confident than those participating in other exercises.

In 1996, Kaplan formed RhythmWorks

Organizational Development, a company that uses group hand drumming, rhythm-based exercises and discussion to focus and motivate sales teams. After participating in a RhythmWorks drumming circle, Kathleen Ross, Vice President of Organization Effectiveness and Communications for Arbitron, a Maryland-based media research firm, said, "It forced us to listen to, be dependent on, and have fun with each other."
—Rebecca Segall



PORTRAYAL

'Bye, Wonderland

After only two episodes, *Wonderland*, ABC's hour-long drama set in a fictional psychiatric hospital in New York City, was cancelled, undoubtedly easing the minds of many mental health practitioners.

The story of a psychiatrist treating mentally ill criminals, *Wonderland* was filled with graphic violence: The series premiere showed a patient wildly shooting six people in New York's Times Square and later attempting suicide. Critics say the show reinforced extreme and inaccurate stereotypes, glamorizing self-destructive behavior.

"This series exploits the most narrow view of mental illness and perpetuates relentless images of despair," said Bob Carolla of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). NAMI leads "The Mental Health Coalition Against Stigma in Hollywood," a coalition of 15 mental health organizations, which convinced at least one pharmaceutical company to pull their ad off the air to protest *Wonderland's* content.

In spite of criticism from mental health professionals, most television critics praised the show, and Robert Berger, Ph.D., director of forensic psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York City and the show's professional consultant, called NAMI's charges "silly." "Vulnerable people might find solace in watching others who are in worse mental crises than they are," he said. Berger, who also consulted on Martin Scorsese's 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*, believes that entertainment is just that. "People aren't interested in watching someone with a minor illness go to a self-help group. Just look at *ER*—they only show the most extreme cases as well."

Was it the criticism of mental health professionals that prompted ABC to yank *Wonderland*? Probably not. Most likely, the network was responding to the steep decline in viewers—from 13.2 million for the first episode to 7.5 million for the second.
—R.S.

BELIEFS

Silly Superstition?

Does eating chicken before a baseball game improve batting? Wade Boggs, one of baseball history's best hitters, believed it did: He ate chicken daily for over 20 years.

It may seem silly, but millions of people worldwide perform similar rituals for luck. In his newly updated book, *Believing in Magic* (Oxford University Press, 2000), Stuart A. Vyse, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Connecticut College, investi-

gates why so many rational people believe so strongly in things that seem so irrational.

"We face many important and uncertain challenges, and superstition provides the illusion of control when it's lacking," Vyse says. Practicing superstition can be psychologically beneficial. "Superstitious rituals can reduce tension and give a sense that you're doing what you can to help out," he says.

Most superstitions are harmless, but Vyse notes that some have serious consequences. Superstitious beliefs about luck may prolong problem gambling, and belief in alternative medical techniques over traditional treatment can lead to grave illness.

Still, superstition is basically healthy, and some of the world's most talented people are also the most superstitious: Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky habitually tucked the right side of his jersey behind his hip pads for luck before every game. —Carin Gorrell

