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## Web Junkie

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### Web Junkie

#### **Abstract**

This is a film review of Web Junkie (2013), directed by Shosh Shlam and Hilla Medalia.

#### **Author Notes**

Jodi McDavid is an instructor in Folklore and Gender & Women's Studies at Cape Breton University. She earned her BA at St. Thomas University (New Brunswick) and her MA and PhD from Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her PhD dissertation was on anticlericalism in folk and popular culture. Her current research interests include vernacular religion, the folklore and folklife of children and adolescents, and gender and women's studies.

### **Web Junkie** (2013)

#### directed by Shosh Shlam, Hilla Medalia



Web Junkie is a documentary on the growing problem of Internet addiction in China. The film explores the practices of one military hospital which acts as a reprogramming facility for children suffering

from online addiction.

The majority of the children in the program seem to be an average of 16 years old, and are predominately male (there only seem to be about three percent females).

The title of the film is somewhat misleading; the phenomenon that is being looked at is online gaming, more so than simple excessive online behaviour. Chinese youth can go to computer gaming halls—which resemble slot machines in gambling halls—and play for 10-12 hours, easily. There were reports of some children playing games for three days, nodding off in their chairs and waking to continue. Other children wore diapers in order to continue sitting at their station. The games the children played were what are commonly called RPGs, or role playing games, such as World of Warcraft.

Although the documentary does not deal with religion directly, there are several topics which emerge which are suitable for philosophical and ethical discussion. China is apparently one of the "first countries in the world to label Internet overuse as addiction." This raises the issue of why certain illnesses or mental health conditions are found more frequently in one culture than another. The pervasiveness of loneliness and the near impossible standards for

success were cited as one reason why children find solace in online communities. China's "one child policy" was mentioned as a potential contributor to this sense of isolation.

It is tragic to see children housed in small dormitories, and sometimes isolated for days on end. The majority are here as a last resort, tricked or drugged by their parents and brought for "reprogramming." Much like the issue of the anti-cult movement's behaviours of reprogramming, we must ask whether we have a right to make individuals follow a particular idea of what is correct or incorrect belief and behaviour.

— Jodi McDavid