

2018

## Op Ed – Little Red Herrings – Addicted to Love, Sort Of

Mark Y. Herring

*Dacus Library, Winthrop University, herringm@winthrop.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Herring, Mark Y. (2018) "Op Ed – Little Red Herrings – Addicted to Love, Sort Of," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 30: Iss. 4, Article 58.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.8287>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

## Op Ed — Little Red Herrings — Addicted to Love, Sort Of

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University)  
<herringm@winthrop.edu>

**W**e Americans are an addictive people. Give us a novelty and we'll eventually have to turn it into a 12-step program. Fast food? We'll eat it until it kills us. Painkillers? We'll abuse them until denied them, and then turn to black tar heroin as a substitute. Pornography? Well, that "harmless" pastime has now become so prevalent among even young people that many think you don't need a bedroom so much as an abattoir. And don't get me started about gaming. Only yesterday (19 June), the **World Health Organization (WHO)** declared it an addictive behavior (<https://bit.ly/2tdHWbj>), and now everyone is obsessing over whether it really is or not.

It now turns out that we've made smartphones a kind of hysteria, not to mention dementia (thanks, **Apple**). According to a study released in late 2017, the average person (whoever he is) checks his cellphone about eighty times a day. Eighty times, 8-0. I thought it was a misprint and then I began thinking about people I know, some I love, and some with whom I work (you know who you are). Eighty seemed too few. Only the stalwart can go more than ten minutes before checking her phone. And, I imagine by now, as you come to the end of this paragraph, you're checking yours, too...again. We suffer separation anxiety when we go for long without these costly, annoying, rectangles we call "smart." (The only "smart" in smartphone is those who make them!) We experience euphoria when we find them nearby. And we panic into mania when we cannot find where we last put them.

So, is this addictive? Let's see. The first stage of addiction is constant use. Check. The second stage is continued, and at times, uncontrollable use. Yes, so far, so bad. Third is tolerance, or rather the need to go back to stage two and up the ante to more use. Yep. Fourth is dependence, or the inability to stay away from the use. Those in this stage feel "awkward" when the addictive factor isn't present, or they feel abnormal when it isn't around. Need I say more? Lastly is addiction, or the stage when it is impossible, or nearly so, to stay away from the addictive element for any time at all, and even falling into a panic when forced to. Bingo!

**Stanford** students have found this to be such a problem that they marshaled, what else, a protest: **Stanford Students Against Addictive Devices (SSAD)**, <https://bit.ly/2lppvQ>). Ironically, the group's main quaternion are computer science majors, so they should know. **SSAD's** website (<https://captive.ml/>) warns against too much use, asks students to track their usage (on an app?), and warns students how they can tell when they are much too attached.

Physicians are now beginning to worry, too (<https://bit.ly/2GP6t5>). We spend too much time on our smartphones, do not interact with others, prefer even to "converse" through the phones, and often walk blindly about staring into them as if a sryer into her crystal ball (even at the expense of falling into holes or walking into walls). Now suddenly, we're all being reminded not to text and drive, which strikes me as foolish as telling folks not to smoke while pumping gas, but there it is.

This addictive behavior impinges upon the work of those of us in libraries because it reminds us that the ever-ephemeral attention span is now more than ever shorter still. Even evanescent, one might say. Libraries are not exactly the slap-dash kind of place where you can get what you need on the run. They are more contemplative places, and that fact runs squarely in the face of those funding us who cannot spare half a minute.

But it's more than that, too. We know that increasing majorities of people get their news off their cellphones, the bare bones stories that are, in many ways, as tasteless as bread taken from the oven an hour too soon. That news is often incubated on the web in time that is measured in nanoseconds; its lifeline is that handheld device you may have paused again to check while reading this column. Too many of our clientele come

to us with minds made up on flimsy facts and questionable querulousness. Getting them out of their phones long enough to ask a question is more than a small challenge. The few classes I now teach are made worse by the number of students on handheld devices of some kind, and minds in a cyberspace far, far away.

Is there any hope? An enterprising **Ohio State University** professor (<https://bit.ly/2KxnWXj>) started banning these devices and their cousins (iPads, tablets) in the classroom and now reports what will be for some astonishing results: classes are

better, discussions more intelligent, and — shocking, I tell you — students getting better grades. No, you cannot have it all, and you cannot multitask even while failing at it.

I fear we are now like **Macbeth**: "in blood stepped so far that ... returning were as tedious as go o'er." I'm not asking for a ban of all devices everywhere and a return to clay tablets, so, please, no hate email. But it is time that we take this matter a bit more seriously.

Maybe little steps will help. Make eye contact with someone, invite him or her for coffee (and not by email), and perhaps even answer that last dinner invitation with a hand-written thank you. Try living an hour without your cellphone and then perhaps try going a day without it. It will not do, of course, if these are only isolated events that occur once, and that is all. Nevertheless, we have to start somewhere, and maybe, just maybe, seeing someone face-to-face will be the start of a kind of healing.

Text me @kipper if any of this works. 🌱

