



cyber.rules

What You Really Need to Know
About the Internet

The Essential Guide
for Clinicians, Educators,
and Parents

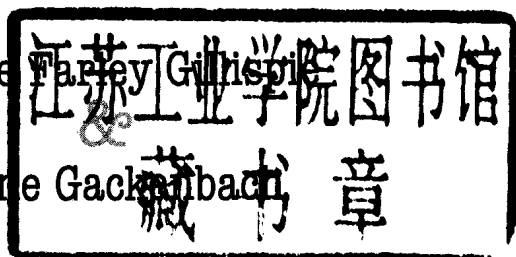
Joanie Farley Gillispie • Jayne Gackenbach

Cyber Rules

What You Really
Need to Know
About the
Internet

Joanie Farley Gillispie

Jayne Gackaibach



W.W. Norton & Company

New York · London

Copyright © 2007 by Joanie Farley Gillispie and Jayne Gackenbach

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
First Edition

For information about permission to reproduce
selections from this book, write to
Permissions, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,
500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

Production Manager: Leeann Graham
Manufacturing by: Haddon Craftsman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gillispie, Joanie Farley.

Cyber rules: what you really need to know about the
Internet/Joanie Farley

Gillispie, Jayne Gackenbach.

p. cm.

"A Norton professional book."

includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-393-70484-6

ISBN-10: 0-393-70484-X

1. Internet. 2. World Wide Web. 3. Internet-Safety measures.
4. Internet-Social aspects. 5. Interpersonal relations-Computer network
resources. 6. Medical care-Computer network resources.
I. Gackenbach, Jayne, 1946-II. Title.

TK5101.875.I57G52 2006
004.678-dc22 200604720

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N. Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House,
75/76 Wells St., London W1T 3QT

1 3 5 7 9 0 8 6 4 2

Preface

Hanging out and hooking up in cyberspace: a powerful, transpersonal, transformational repository of good and bad, a cyber-collective unconscious. The urge to coalesce our experiences with children, youth, and families into a book has been percolating for thirty years. As psychologists and university faculty, Jayne and I have always been concerned that we teachers and mental health professionals are not as helpful as we could be, given the levels of distress we see in our patients and students: depression, chronic worries, addiction, unsatisfying relationships. Now these problems are creeping into cyberspace and we really don't know what to do about them.

It was difficult to create a literary product from such an amorphous and novel topic that would be both scholarly and practical. We did not want this book to be a tome of doom and dire warnings about how the Internet is corrupting our kids or contributing to the breakdown of the family. Nor did we want to succumb to a digital version of Internet Tips or Parenting 101 by promoting more of the same that does not work offline. How do we write a book about solving problems in cyberspace when we aren't solving the same ones offline? However, the Internet is as awesome (we collaborated on and wrote this book from two different countries) as it is awful (such as infant porn posted online using live Web cam).

The stakes are too high for knee-jerk solutions. We need a strategy that recognizes and understands the power of digital technology *or the power of digital technology will use us*. Internet media socializes people in new ways and will only continue to do this more, generating profound changes within ourselves, in our relationships, and in our communities. Here are some facts about our health offline: 20% of American children live in poverty in the richest nation in the world. Adults are a stressed-out bunch, ill from preventable diseases and bad habits. Many of us still are suffering from issues left over from childhood. We're unhappy and self-absorbed. Why do 50% of marriages end in divorce? Because we are confused and often ignorant or in denial about our issues, and now they are online.

Kids need help even more than adults because when they do not get their needs met at critical periods of development, they often spend a lifetime paying for it in one way or another, and so does society. Adolescents fare even worse. Our teens, at the cusp of adulthood, have the worst health of youth in developed nations and one of the poorest academic standings. Too many kids are depressed, obese, using drugs, and disconnected from their communities. Youths in the United States have more teen pregnancies, more STDs, more sexual partners, and a younger age of sexual debut than their European counterparts. Huh? What are we modeling? What is the message? What about their future? Do we care about the legacy of bad health and bad habits we are leaving behind (by default if nothing else)? Do we care about kids, do we care about each other? Questions about sex and relationships have always generated potent discussions and opinions. We're all looking for love and now we're doing it online.

While we can't seem to help young people handle the supersize pressures of growing up, the media is doing it for us. Cornell West, professor emeritus of religion at Princeton, says "we have it backwards. For 50 years we've been teaching our kids to be successful, be successful . . . when we should be teaching them to be great" (2004). What does West's philosophy have to do with *Cyber Rules*? The multimedia Internet experience makes kids feel great. Kids have power online and they know it.

Jayne and I do not claim that *Cyber Rules* is a panacea for everything that is wrong with cyberspace but we stand behind the information,

problem-solving model, and advice in this book. We just can't ignore how Internet media is changing us. Communicating online enables us to be intimate and global, real and fake. Do we know the difference? Do we even care? How do we negotiate wellness through the maze of online interactive media effects that we have largely ignored offline?

We can use the Internet to close the gap between what we want young people to learn (which many do not learn well enough) and West's vision of greatness. Not success, not money, not stuff, but personal responsibility, concern for others, and a shared stake in the health of future generations. It's no accident that the title of this book is *Cyber Rules*. The Internet rocks and certainly rules the world for young people! Ask anyone who met a mate online or surfed the Web and learned what amberggris is at \$200,000 per ounce. Children and adolescents embody the archetype of the Internet communication revolution: young, constantly changing, pushing boundaries, wanting control, rejecting the status quo, exploring identity, and searching for love.

This book is a guide for those who want to understand the power of the Internet media culture in order to use it in positive ways. If we are worried about the effect that media is having on our youth and culture then we need to become media literate *and* much more proactive about lots of things offline that we ignore or avoid. There is harm online. It's the same as offline but it *feels* bigger when projected into cyberspace because we can't control it: anger, racism, sexism, homophobia, greed, distractibility, impulsivity, consumerism, and deception are a part of the cyber collective, but so is altruism, cultural understanding, generosity, self-discovery, and concern for others. *Cyber Rules* acknowledges that few rules can be enforced in cyberspace from an authoritarian model. ("Don't do this because I say so" barely works on the ground.) As a result we need to convince people, kids especially, that there are some potentially harmful things going on in cyberspace that they need to be aware of and avoid, and which could hurt their development or hurt others if they choose to participate—a very tall order.

We need more information and skills for interacting online now, but we also need to understand it for the future, how cyber-human interaction will continue to evolve and change us. We already have wearable

computers, neural implants, and computers that interpret your feelings and respond accordingly. Ironically, the government designed the first computers to decentralize knowledge and protect us in the event of a nuclear war, but now soldiers and F-22 Raptors use remote-sensing Internet technology to home in and kill. The Internet is the power that got away and generations of hackers young enough to be your children can get your password.

What can we do? *Cyber Rules* shares people's cyber stories, discusses the opinions of experts, and then gives the reader the criteria with which to measure and determine if cyber behaviors could threaten healthy development. Rather than a list of "do this or don't do that," *Cyber Rules* wants readers to practice evaluating cyber dilemmas using a problem-solving model and become experts about their own cyber use. This will not be an easy process. Healthy expression online or perversion? Isolation or meaningful connection? Cyber activism or a substitute for getting a life? We cannot be certain about what the psychological and social effects of Internet use will be, but hopefully this book will give you the information and practical advice you need to use the Internet wisely and "get it" about media.

How to Use Cyber Rules

THE AUDIENCE

This book is intended for a crossover audience because most clinicians, educators, and parents grapple with the same cyber issues. However, achieving the right tone for everyone is difficult. Not enough scientific validity and too much hype and clinicians will discount the material as unsubstantiated. Too much research and we will overwhelm the educator and the parent. Jayne and I have tried to find a balance but hope that the reader will find both the science and practicality useful. Clinicians, educators, and parents want answers, but no one is sure whether offline theories about behavior apply to cyberspace. California teachers are mandated to include Web-based curricula in their lesson plans but are not taught online pedagogy. Parents wonder if restricting,

monitoring, or spying on their kids' Internet use is effective, while most teens know how to get around parental controls and are amused when adults think that they are in charge of their media diet.

Cyber Rules wants the reader to know what the research is on Internet effects, but also how to navigate data that can be contradictory because they are too broad or too narrow to apply to a particular cyber problem. Professional books tell therapists to expand their practice online but admit that there are no standards or laws (and few liability companies) that will protect them in cyberspace. More importantly, cyber dilemmas cannot be analyzed by uploading offline rules of psychology, or of law, economics, or politics for that matter, and expecting them to transplant effectively online.

THE INTERVENTIONS

We want you, the reader, to solve the cyber problems presented in the clinical vignettes by imagining that you are the clinician, educator, or parent who must decide whether the cyber behavior is OK or not OK and why. Questionnaires assess knowledge and measure use patterns while the personal stories keep it real. The interactive exercises require you to conceptualize at least two different ways to organize your thinking about what's happening online. The exercises and vignettes test your knowledge and challenge your assumptions about cyberspace. They are designed to generate discussion with those whose opinions may be different from your own: therapists, teachers, colleagues, friends, and most especially young people. Certainly for every horrific cyber story there are an equal number of untold ones that are healthy and authentic. We want you to know the research, understand what potential problems look like online, and practice applying the advice in this book to a variety of scenarios and clinical vignettes so that you then know what to do in real life.

HOW CYBER RULES IS ORGANIZED

The Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 discuss specific problems encountered online and the ways that Internet communication affects identity. Personality and behavior in cyberspace are not constrained by

face-to-face protocol, geography, and time. Is this a good thing? The exercises in Chapter 1, "Online Identities," illustrate that adults and teenagers explore different aspects of their identities online. Healthy Internet use is determined by comparing one's online and offline personalities.

The second part of this book takes the reader into the world of online relationships. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 address cyber social and sexual relationships via text, graphics, cell phones, and Web cams. What effects do these activities have on our offline relationships and well-being? The exercises that accompany these chapters help the reader to explore attitudes about what makes a healthy or unhealthy online relationship. Clinical vignettes and personal stories ask the reader to address the issue of harm online: whether cyber porn is developmentally healthy or a substitute for lack of social contact or whether a cyber affair is a real affair. Here the Internet appears to be redefining the games we play, friendships, dating, and how we look for a mate or a sexual experience. The final section of *Cyber Rules* explores health online: how to find the most accurate health information online and psychological treatment in cyberspace.

The societal problems that are so visible online give us an opportunity to craft a legacy of sustainable health for future generations. Should young people really listen to what we have to say if we leave things as they are? The digital age can help us connect more authentically with our children and make our relationships more meaningful. It's as easy to e-mail someone in the next room as half way around the world. Going global encourages us to appreciate diversity and to challenge our assumptions. But the Internet has forced us to rethink who's in charge, collaborate more when there's a problem, and negotiate solutions to digital dilemmas from a shared power perspective. It would be such a shame if we continue to keep our hearts and minds and actions disconnected, unconscious, and stuck as we log into a new world. We can use the Internet to become great. It is our hope that this book brings you at least partially there, wherever "there" is, for you and those you love.

Acknowledgments

Joanie

My first acknowledgments go to my family: to my husband, Mark, and to my children, Zoe, Gigi, Kellen, and Shane, for teaching me the most. Also to all the other kids who passed the 24-hour rule and became such an important part of our family: you are the lecture (share and don't whine) I never had to give. To my wise and loving father, Philip Farley, for his weekly communication the old-fashioned way, mailing me newspaper clippings because he didn't think I could get them online.

Thank you to all my students and patients over the last 35 years; I could not have done this without your willingness to talk to me about real stuff and to keep talking even when I didn't fully understand. Thank you for keeping in touch over the years. I am so lucky to have amazing friends and colleagues who put up with my steep learning curve with such good humor. Katherine Bang, Dekey Perez, Nicole Guide, and Josie Smith know all my bad habits and love me anyway. Thank you to Cindy Roby and Ginger Thomson for well-timed, laughter-filled cuz fests. And thank you Sandra Harner and Sue Hulley for your deep friendship and support. I appreciate that you listen so carefully but want me to remember that I am a work in progress.

Several universities have expanded and guided my thinking about online communication. Much appreciation to Stan Weisner, chair of the

behavioral sciences department, University of California, Berkeley, for encouraging me to develop courses in media and Internet use. Also I am grateful to the University of Phoenix, California School of Professional Psychology, Alliant International University, and Dominican University, where I got to know a new generations of psychologists, teachers, and nurses.

As for the book, thank you to Lami Lapin for the connection and creativity in designing the cover. It provides a metaphor for what we want to convey to the reader and yet pushes a few status quo buttons in the process. Thanks also to Dr. Judy Kuriansky, media psychologist, for her right-on advice about the title. Most importantly, Jayne and I wish to thank those at W. W. Norton for their acceptance of our original proposal and willingness to publish yet another book about the Internet. We wish to especially acknowledge our editors Deborah Malmud and Michael McGandy for their helpful comments. Their publishing expertise helped us articulate our vision into a palatable read for a wide audience.

Finally, we are grateful to you, the reader. We really wrote *Cyber Rules* for you, hoping it will be a travel guide to cyberspace. If there is a clinician who first examines his or her assumptions about Internet communication before treating a patient with a cyber issue, an educator who models good and confronts bad netiquette, or a parent who really does talk (and listen more) to her children about cyber sexuality, Jayne and I will feel we have accomplished our goal. The Internet forces us to think deeply about the world we live in, especially the effects of media and the way we interact with each other.

Jayne

I would like to begin by thanking Grant MacEwan College (GMC) and especially the department of psychology and sociology and the Grant MacEwan Faculty Scholarly Activity Fund. The Fund provided a grant for a research assistant to aid in editorial duties associated with this book. The grant recipient, Heather von Stackelberg, read and edited every chapter of this book as well as worked on the permissions clearances and other administrative duties. She has also offered insights from

her communications background throughout this process for which Joanie and I are very grateful.

My interest in humans and computers emerged beyond the frequent user stage when Russ Powell, chair of the department of psychology and sociology at GMC, where I am now a full-time instructor, commissioned me to write an online course on dreams for GMC in the mid-1990s. Since then I have been writing and teaching introductory psychology online for GMC through *ecampusalberta*, a cooperative offering online courses (www.ecampusalberta.co). I would also like to thank Evelyn Ellerman, head of the communications studies program at Athabasca University, for her early and ongoing support of my work with human-computer interactions by asking me to write two courses for the program.

Many others have contributed to and supported my interest in computers, the Internet, and video games and they include colleagues (Brian Brookwell, Joan Preston, Jim Karpen, Storm King, Nikki Levi, David Lukoff, Steve Reiter, Harry Hunt, Richard Wilkerson, Jill Fisher), students (Grant MacEwan College, Athabasca University, and Saybrook Graduate School), technical support staff (Grant MacEwan College and Athabasca University), friends (Erik Schmidt, Peter Thomas, Wendy Pullin), and family (Mason Goodloe, Tony Lachel). Finally, I would like to acknowledge the eternal and special contributions of my children (Trina Snyder Lachel and Teace Snyder), mother (Agnes Gackenbach), and sister (Leslie Goodloe), without whose support and love no work could be accomplished.

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1

1. Online Identities 19
2. Children's and Teens' Media Lives 44
3. Net Relationships: From Fake to Falling in Love 81
4. Video Games: The Dark and Light Sides of the Force 107
5. Hooking Up: Cyber Sex and Youth 148
6. Got Health Online? 175
7. Evolving in Cyberspace 193

References 200

Index 233

Introduction

*Life arises from the endless interplay of polarity force . . .
heaven and earth, active and passive, light and dark, heat and
cold, dampness and dryness, contraction and relaxation . . .
The two forces attract and repel each other continuously.
Their interplay creates all energy, matter,
and the dynamic movement of life.
(PECK & PECK).*

Getting It About the Internet

How do we *get it* about the Internet? What's *it* anyway? We wrote this book to help you learn about the Internet from both a psychological and a communications perspective. *Getting it* means digital media literacy: knowing how to use the Internet rather than being used by it. On the one hand we need to get it quickly, especially when there is so much bad press out there about kids' and adults' habits online. On the other hand, few argue that the power of digital technology has transformed our lives. Ask anyone what would happen if we suddenly couldn't use our computers, kids especially. Pulitzer Prize-winning author and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman believes the Internet has flattened the world, "challenging hierarchical structures with a horizontal model of innovation" (2005, p. 103). Friedman describes what he means:

Clearly it is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world using the computers, e-mail, networks, teleconferencing, and

dynamic new software. But contemplating the flat world also left me filled with dread, professional and personal . . . I realized that this flattening was taking place while I was sleeping, and I had missed it. I wasn't really sleeping but I was otherwise engaged. (p. 8)

Many of us can relate to Friedman's statement. The Internet has changed us in subtle and obvious ways and there is no end in sight to the fecundity of human-digital intercourse. Wear or cuddle with your computer? Step into the screen? Fascinating. Online love and hate? Confusing. Live-cam sexual exploitation of infants? Horrific. Where to turn for guidance in terms of kids' online lives? Here, for a start. This book is our effort to wake you up, so to speak, so that you can be in cyber-space consciously and meaningfully and your young ones will listen when you talk to them about harm online and not just tune you out (like they do offline). However, we want you to resist the need to be told what to do. The human effects of Internet use are complex. There's a lot at stake and a lot we don't know. We do not begin with what kids are doing online on purpose. We start, rather, with an overview of identity in cyberspace and the ways these cyber identities connect with others. *Cyber Rules* analyzes how our online identities and personalities compare to who we are offline. The cognitive and social mechanics of being plugged in electronically appear to be changing our neuro-anatomy. Take writing, for example. Keyboarding, as opposed to writing with our dominant hand, fully engages both hemispheres of the brain at once. This simultaneous dance of information processing allows right-brain functions, primarily non-verbal and spacial, to tango with the left's expertise in decoding verbal meanings. Of course this is reversed in left-handed people. Interestingly, our left hand types more words on the keyboard due to the way the letters are positioned. This forces our right hemisphere to expand verbal processing capabilities. Because young people's brains are still growing, these new, more interconnected ways of communicating will certainly have more profound effects than writing the old fashioned way.

IQ scores appear to be going up, indicating that we are able to process information faster. Many attribute this to the digital age (Johnson, 2005). We may also be more socially focused online. How? A quarter of the motor cortex, the part of the brain that controls all movement

in the body, is devoted to the hands. Our fingertips are adept at communicating, as signers and lovers will attest. Even Freud understood the power of our hands: "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips" (Freud, 1932, n.p.).

Is there a down side to being online? Perhaps. Social scientists believe that our online interactions are expanding identity, but also redefining the way we interact and socialize with others (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Warschauer, 2003). What's happening to the power of in-person communicating online? Is it shallow or deeper, transformed in some way that we won't fully realize until our grandchildren are adults? How do the subtleties, nuances, and reciprocity so essential to offline relating manifest in cyberspace? Media psychologist Lilli Friedland is concerned but hopeful:

Is it possible that we have become a mass of electronic hermits, not able to work or play well together? The traditional institutions of "civilizing" people, family, school, community, church/synagogue are challenged by trying to serve people whose loyalty is almost entirely to themselves. Will some people prefer to live in a fictitious world created almost entirely by the entertainment industry? As electronic media absorb more and more time, people may become less motivated to care for things and do anything for anyone but themselves . . . The younger generations are techno-savvy and prefer to communicate via Internet than face-to-face. The new media may dis-socialize people . . . but perhaps we should really look at technology as instruments that can make our lives easier and faster and give us the opportunity to focus on personal meaning. (2005, pp. 2, 6)

Attachment theorist Daniel Stern (2004) believes that socialization is the primary mechanism that brings meaning to our lives. He suggests that the language and sensory areas of our brain direct this process and becomes

an intersubjective matrix where mechanisms such as mirror neurons may be the center of conditions for synchrony, imitation and

attunement (which) could be factors in controlling empathy and resonance with the other. (Klien, 2005, n.p.)

Mirror neurons fire away when we are engaged with each other online and with media. Neuro-scientist Marco Iacoboni at UCLA believes that these neurons may contribute to violent behavior offline because they are activated more easily after viewing violent media or engaging in combative, angry chat. Iacoboni believes this may predispose one to act more aggressively (Goldberg, 2005).

There's a lot of research *and* speculation about how the Internet affects us. Fortunately, gathering information from around the world, talking to experts online, and hearing people's online stories is easy to do in cyberspace. But the purpose of this book is more than an intellectual exercise or the need to give advice. We want the reader to learn how to use the Internet and consume media in more positive ways, to improve our relationships and our world so that our kids won't fall into the same old potholes we did. Are we for real? Why not? We have the technologies now to reach and teach almost everyone on the planet. This book is divided into three sections to make cyber culture more palatable. We discuss research, talk about projections of the self online as well as loving and playing in cyberspace. But we also include personal stories and mini vignettes so you can learn about others' experiences and thus gain perspective about your own. One of the most exciting aspects of our digital world is that it allows us to appreciate people who are different from us. Here is what Xiang, a high school student, writes from Malaysia:

I have heard people tell me how unhealthy they think the Internet is, how information on the Internet just isn't reliable or accurate, how it results in dehumanising relationships. I listen to all of this while stewing inside. I am adolescent. Of course, you will say that my reaction is to be expected. Since adolescents love to argue and disagree and fight and talk back. Since adolescents love spending hours online chatting and playing games. But what I feel is relevant, is that I am also profoundly deaf. I am fully oral now but only beginning to learn sign language; but even my hearing aids do