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Posted on Tue, Feb. 22, 2005

## Bloggers' Internet obsession

By K. Oanh Ha  
Mercury News

Amy Sherman recently woke up at 4 a.m. in a panic. Why wasn't her food blog getting as much traffic as others?

"I daydream about the blog throughout the day. . . . I worry about it at night. I sometimes put as much energy into it as my job," said Sherman, 40, a self-employed marketing consultant in San Francisco who makes no money from her blog, *Cooking With Amy* ([www.cookingwithamy.com](http://www.cookingwithamy.com)).

Sherman and many others who publish the online journals known as Weblogs, or "blogs" for short, have discovered the addictive nature of blogging. What starts out as a hobby for some can end up permeating their lives and minds. Some of the diarists post repeatedly throughout the day, juggle several blogs and feel anxious if they don't write. Most dedicated bloggers say the endeavor has enriched their lives, but some worry about finding balance and keeping their obsession in check.

"There is a narcotic quality to it," said Anil Dash, a prominent 29-year-old San Francisco technology blogger ([www.anildash.com](http://www.anildash.com)). "The more you post, the more readers you get. It's easy for people to get sucked into it."

### Mental notes

San Jose blogger Rachel Pottol, who writes about life with toddlers, constantly composes blog posts in her head for her site ([www.livejournal.com/users/cerulean\\_me](http://www.livejournal.com/users/cerulean_me)). As she goes through her day, the 26-year-old makes mental notes of good fodder: her daughter being entranced by the "Happy Birthday" song, her arguments with her husband, her work as a mother's helper. She set up Internet access on her cell phone just so she can check e-mail hourly for reader comments. "It's a way for me to connect with other moms," she said. "I feel like it's my job to keep these people entertained."

Blogs have become a fixture on the Internet landscape, with 14 new ones created every minute, according to Technorati, which tracks nearly 7 million blogs. "Blog" was the most looked-up word at Merriam-Webster's dictionary Web site last year.

Many blogs are a chronicle of experiences and feelings. Others focus on a topic -- sports, food,

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hobbies, politics, pets.

For most people, blogs are a healthy means of self-expression and validation, said Boston psychologist John Grohol, who studies online behavior. Most digital diarists find gratification in connecting with readers. Some feel the need to apologize to readers if they have not updated enough.

But blogging can become so all-consuming that it overshadows reality. "They spend enormous amounts of time blogging rather than living," Grohol said.

The blogosphere was abuzz in January after Justin Hall, a Los Angeles Internet junkie, posted a video of himself having a self-described "breakdown." In a wrenching 10-minute video, Hall, who has kept an online journal for 11 years, cries and agonizes whether he has lived too much of his life virtually.

The episode arose because the woman he loves didn't want him to blog about their relationship -- and he believed he had to choose between her and his "art."

"I think the Web makes me not alone," said Hall, 30, in his video entry ([www.links.net](http://www.links.net)). "I feed it my intimacies, and the Web is my constant connection to something larger than myself."

He's now reassessing the balance in his life and has stopped blogging for the moment. "I was living too much in the electronic world," he said in an interview. "I could sit on the computer all day, but it's not the same as being with a girl and smelling her hair."

### **Addicted to blogging?**

Among bloggers, addiction is a running joke. One even offered a checklist: "You are addicted to blogging if you answer 'yes' to at least 3 of the following questions," Joi Ito, a Japanese venture capitalist with Silicon Valley ties, wrote on his blog ([joi.ito.com](http://joi.ito.com)). "Do you think about everything in terms of whether it will make a good blog entry? Do you keep your computer in standby mode beside your bed and wake up at 2 a.m. to blog? Do you skip lunch and blog instead?"

Dave Pell, a San Francisco angel investor, fits the bill. He juggles three blogs -- one about technology ([www.davenetics.com](http://www.davenetics.com)), another about politics ([www.electablog.com](http://www.electablog.com)) and a third about, well, blogs ([www.theblogblog.com](http://www.theblogblog.com)).

Addiction, he said, is the only explanation for why he started the latest, the Blog Blog, and posts more than a dozen times a day. "It's involuntary for me at this point. It's a part of who I am."

Pell, 38, said he attends events he might otherwise pass up -- so he can blog about them.

"It's about ego, in a way," said Pell, whose blogs draw 250,000 page views a month. "A few thousand people might read your take on something. It's pretty empowering."

For some, keeping a blog subtly colors every aspect of life. Renee Blodgett carries a digital camera wherever she goes to capture images for Down the Avenue ([www.downtheavenue.com](http://www.downtheavenue.com)), which mixes notes on San Francisco, technology and poetry. She walked into a cafe recently and caught herself paying attention to the colors, sounds and people. "I was thinking how I could turn it into a post," said Blodgett, who is in her mid-30s. "Before, I'd just sit down, have my bowl of soup and zone out."

Yet Blodgett worries whether the blog will make her less social. "Will I become more engaged with my laptop, more engaged with my blog than I am with people?" she said.

For Sherman, her blogging obsession is tied into sharing her food passion with others. When she went on a three-week Mexican vacation in December, she planned her family's itinerary around getting to an Internet cafe.

"When I'm on vacation, I fear I'll lose visitors or people will forget about me," Sherman said. "I feel a sense of responsibility. I have a readership, a public, people who care if I stop writing. That

drives me."

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