

Suicide, cannibalism and starvation: just a keystroke away

Contributed by Debbie Smit
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What a wonderfully humane invention the snooze button is! Whichever benevolent soul it was who felt that it was necessary to take the edge off being woken up by a machine, I salute you.

Humanity's neediness, our common frailties, have inspired inventions that rock our world – cars to get us further quicker, telephones to speed our voices around the world, artificial body parts, cameras to record our existence. Surely we are on the brink of cheating even the ever-present spectre of death. That is if we don't first blot out the sun and unceremoniously choke on our own exhaust.

Chris Korda, vegetarian cross-dresser, progeny of novelist Michael Korda and founder of the Church of Euthanasia (such a pretty euphemism for death), takes self-destructive behaviour to the next level. His internet and multimedia presence encourages the practices of cannibalism, sodomy, abortion and suicide as a means to saving the earth by reducing the population. His website, which includes instructions on how to kill oneself with cyanide and helium, has a counter ominously recording the ever-increasing world population. The website also has downloadable bumper stickers which, if you are so inclined, you can place on your own website: "Who needs oxygen anyway", "Eat people not animals" and "Save the earth, kill yourself."

The disturbing website is one of many so-called suicide websites that one might inadvertently stumble upon while surfing. On one of her shows, dear old Oprah documented the case of a young woman who was encouraged by fellow suicidal surfers to ingest potassium cyanide. The sites characteristically include chat rooms and blogs where like-minded individuals might meet to plan suicide pacts.

The first known internet related suicide occurred in Japan in October 2003. The Japanese, with their penchant for ritual and mass suicide, have reported 91 such deaths but similar incidents are being reported in Hong Kong, South Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Norway, Sweden and Canada. An article published by the Canterbury Suicide Project in May last year notes that traditional suicide pacts (as opposed to online ones) usually involve older people aged between 50 and 60 years old, while cyber-suicides tend to involve younger people.

Armin Meiwes, the internet cannibal who conducted an online relationship with his intended before dismembering him and eating him in the flesh, recently had his original 2004 conviction of manslaughter extended to one of life imprisonment for murder. Although cannibalism has been around forever, with the earliest documented incident during the siege of Samaria in the Book of Kings, where this modern act differs is that Meiwes accessed his victim via the internet by advertising for a "well-built male for slaughter and consumption". 43-year-old Bernd-Jurgen Brandes volunteered, allowing Meiwes to fulfill the fantasy he had had since the age of 12 .

Some say that anorexics and bulimics could be guilty of cannibalism. Death by deliberate starvation causes the body to consume itself. The number of websites encouraging this practice is steadily growing. Hundreds of pro-anorexia online communities call anorexics and bulimics "anas" and "mias" and regard their ED's (eating disorders) as a lifestyle rather than a pathology. With names like 'bodyeatme', 'perfectpain' and 'onlybones' one assumes that a skeletal state can be the only release from this struggle for perfection. One website subtitled "bleed me skinny" encourages self-mutilation as well as starvation, with the exhortation to "mold our bodies slice by slice". Nasty stuff. Is it murder by proxy disguised as concern? Does the remoteness of the informants absolve them from complicity?

And why has the Reverend Chris Korda not topped himself yet?© Debbie smit – The Sunday Independent