



What does "Addicted to Oil" mean?

Posted by [Yankee](#) on February 6, 2006 - 10:15pm

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

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I've been meaning to write a post about Bush's choice of words for a week now, but of course everyone has beaten me to it. Today, Dave Roberts of Gristmill has an [insightful take](#) on the issue:

When Bush talks about "addiction," the subtext is always his own carefully constructed personal narrative: The youthful alcohol problems and the redeeming power of Jesus and the love of a good woman. In Bush's campaign story, he was spiritually redeemed; he shook off addiction by improving his character. The subtext of America being "addicted" is that the American people are somehow fallen and weak.

But America does not rely on oil by virtue of any moral failing. It is not a weakness. It's simple prudence: For quite a long time now, oil has been an incredibly cheap, incredibly concentrated source of energy.

My first reaction to the use of the phrase was to perk up my ears. My second reaction came a day later, when Bush and his talking heads [backtracked](#) on what they'd said the night before. As Roberts also notices, the issue here is what it means to be addicted. When one is addicted, the solution is not to find alternative/better/cheaper ways to feed the addiction. The solution is to cure the addiction. Curing any addiction—from alcohol to heroin to oil—necessarily means eradicating the need for the substance.

By the way, Europeans are skeptical. As the [Nieman Foundation for Journalism explains](#), Bush is still acting more as the pusher than as the addict:

But stereotypical visions of American highways and city streets clogged with gas-guzzling SUV's, oversized sedans and the occasional Hummer were only temporarily compromised. Reading the fine print, it became clear that Bush's speech was more political than realistic.

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[BBC](#): "...It is worth noting [that Bush] put energy in its place. He mentioned the need to detox from oil only as the sixth on a list of seven measures the United States had to take to stay "competitive."..."Nor are the words "greenhouse gases" (mentioned in the speech)."

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Trouw de Verdieping: "Bush has no intention of tackling America's oil addiction" suggests that Bush is only talking about decreasing its dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

"Bush accuses Americans of being addicted to oil. But he won't do anything to help them kick the habit..."

"From his speech it is clear that Bush is talking about independence from the Middle East, not America's energy addiction."

So clearly, the terminology that Bush used was not the wording that he apparently meant to use, or even should have used, if he wanted to maintain his own credibility. Oddly enough, Bush and his speechwriters apparently **do** have a knack for using memorable phrases that stick in the public consciousness ("war on terror", "axis of evil"). In those cases, these pithy phrases helped the administration succeed in convincing the public that we're constantly under siege. Today, is it possible that even though the president is [furiously trying to retract his statement](#), that the proclamation of our "addiction to oil" has already done irrevocable damage (in a good way, that is)?



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