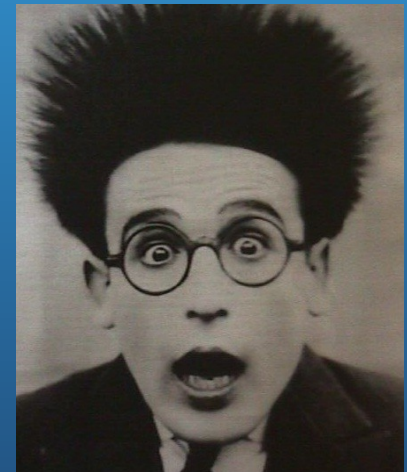# PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE:

An outline for parents and families

Dr Philip Tam BA, MBBS, MA, FRANZCP, Cert Child Psych

Child/ adolescent psychiatrist
Lecturer, Sydney University

Co-founder NiIRA   (**www.niira.org.au)**

Outline of Session

- General topic overview

- The 'scale' of the problem – or is it a problem?

- Cultural and sociological perspectives

- What makes IT *so addictive??*

- Teenage use and overuse – practical issues in the classroom, for school counsellors and families

- The 'psychology' and the 'philosophy' of Internet

- Interactive; Case Discussions ….

A brief history of IT and computing

- Evolution of computing and Internet essentially as a result of **WWII** and the **Cold War**: **Norbert Wiener, USA** (*cybernetics* and *feedback*) ; **Alan Turing, UK** (early computer devpt and theory)

- Alongside Military/ DARPA developments, 'universalist/ countercultural movements' – Whole Earth Catalogue, Wozniak & Jobs in 1970's

- Not a strictly 'new' phenomenon, but major take off in late 90's, and again in late 2000's – HTML, Intel chip, commercial input

- Emergent concept of '**digital natives**' vs. '**digital immigrants**' (Prensky, 2003); political stance on **control vs. open society** (notably USA).

- 'Early adopters' – within a country, between countries.

- Likely to continue to grow inexorably, and in ways we cannot yet imagine

- The emergence of the 'matrix' ("Cloud computing"), and of 'Two Worlds' (cybergeopolitics)

Current Research and Debate

- First 'concerns' in 1996/7 in psychiatric fields   (Drs. Goldberg, Young, Block in USA)

- Clear increase in research volume in 2000's; no less than 3 interntl, dedicated Journals

- Questionnaire development:

    - Goldberg 1996 (DSM addictive criteria)

    - Brenner 1997

    - Young DQ 1998 (mod. Pathol. Gambling) – 5/8 items positive

    - Porter, Starcevic et al - ANZJP Feb 2010

    - many others/ lack of theory or agreement

        Hard, if not impossible, to devise the 'perfect' q'naire

- Real need for consensus, theory-driven research, causal and not just associative relations

Violent video games vs. Internet

-Gaming/ violence studied for much longer – laboratory, survey, correlational.

- Still controversy over 'real-world' effects
-Ongoing political/ lobbying pressure

-New media focus on maladaptive websites, cyberbullying, teen suicide etc

-The 'General Aggression Model' as standard (Anderson, Bushman 2005)

What do Teens *really* crave in development?

- Instant feedback

- Commercial/ consumer priming; 'loss of Youth'

- The 'holy Trinity' of attraction:

    CONNECTION

    AGENCY

    REWARD ….. *and the 'effort/reward ratio'*

- Psychoanalytical: substitute parent; attachment object

- Or, conversely, the 'special/ secret Zone'

- *Apeirophilia :* innate desire for 'touching the infinite'

- *Apeirophilia* in

  Representational Art :

- *Apeirophilia* in Representational Art :

Caspar David Friedrich
'The Wanderer above the Mists' (1818)

JMW Turner -   "Morning – Day after the Deluge"   1843

Core Gaming principles: the 3 'Fs'
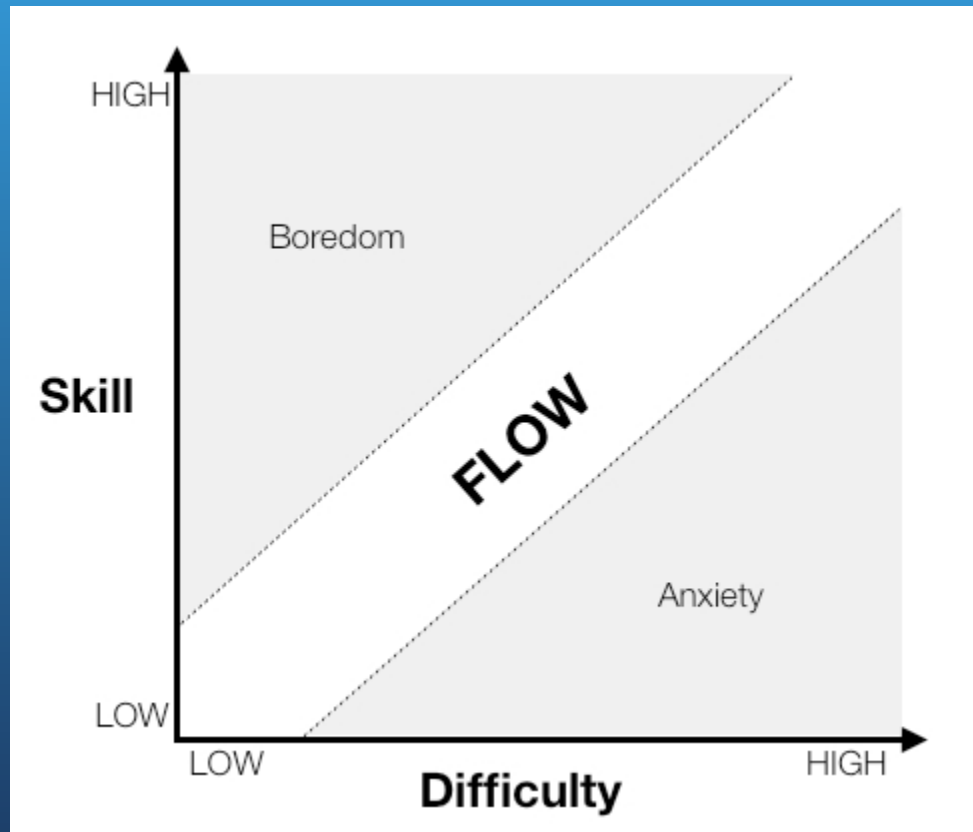
- FLOW

- *FIERO*

-FRUSTRATION or 'FUN FAIL

…think of examples of *'successful games' !*

The 'Aristotlelean Principle' (or 'engagement curve' in Flow Psychology)
– adap.   M. Csikszentmihalyi 1990

Examining the clinical problem (1)

- Early warning signs

- Concept of the '**sentinel**' or '**gateway**' illness

- The 4 'levels' of PIU

  Level 1 PIU : mild impact, early problems

  Level 2 :   incr'd impact; social circle notices (schooling, peers etc.); anger/ irritability on limits

  Level 3 :   clinical impact; co-morbidity; spec. intervention indicated

  Level 4 :   'addiction', or pathological IU;

      major or whole social-role impact

Examining the clinical problem (2)

Associated co-morbidities ….

*anxiety*   *depression*

anomie   *ADHD*

Asperger's   *Boredom*

Examining the clinical problem (3): role(s) of the family & circle

- Communication is key : pointless 'antagonising'

- Many feel 'early intervention' (ie. in primary school) has to work

- Sentinel illness (above)

- The 'enabler' (drug use analogy)

- Ensuring of treatment/ contracts etc. *Very* hard to accept clinical help.

- All above dependent on *age, relations issues.*

- Use of the ***IMPROVE*** tool

I'D LIKE TO SEE ONE OF THOSE UNITS YOU SET BY YOUR TV TO KEEP KIDS FROM VIEWING OFFENSIVE & VIOLENT PROGRAMMING.
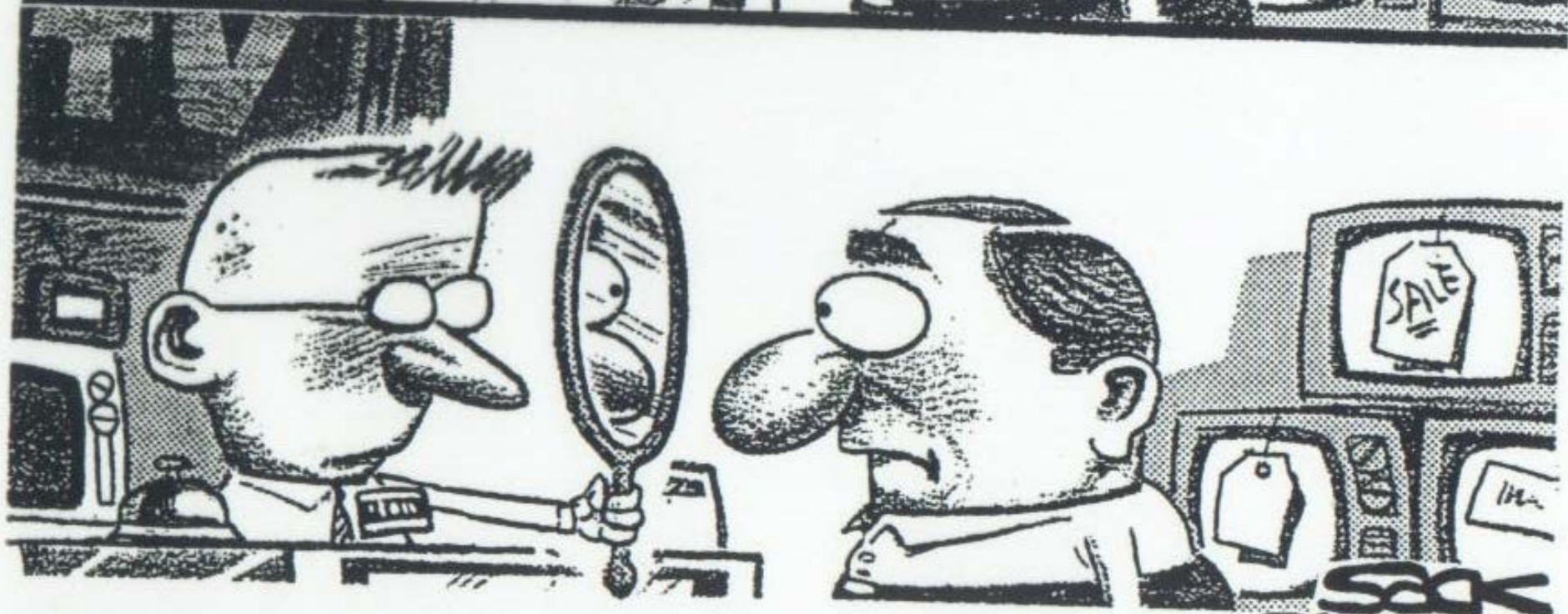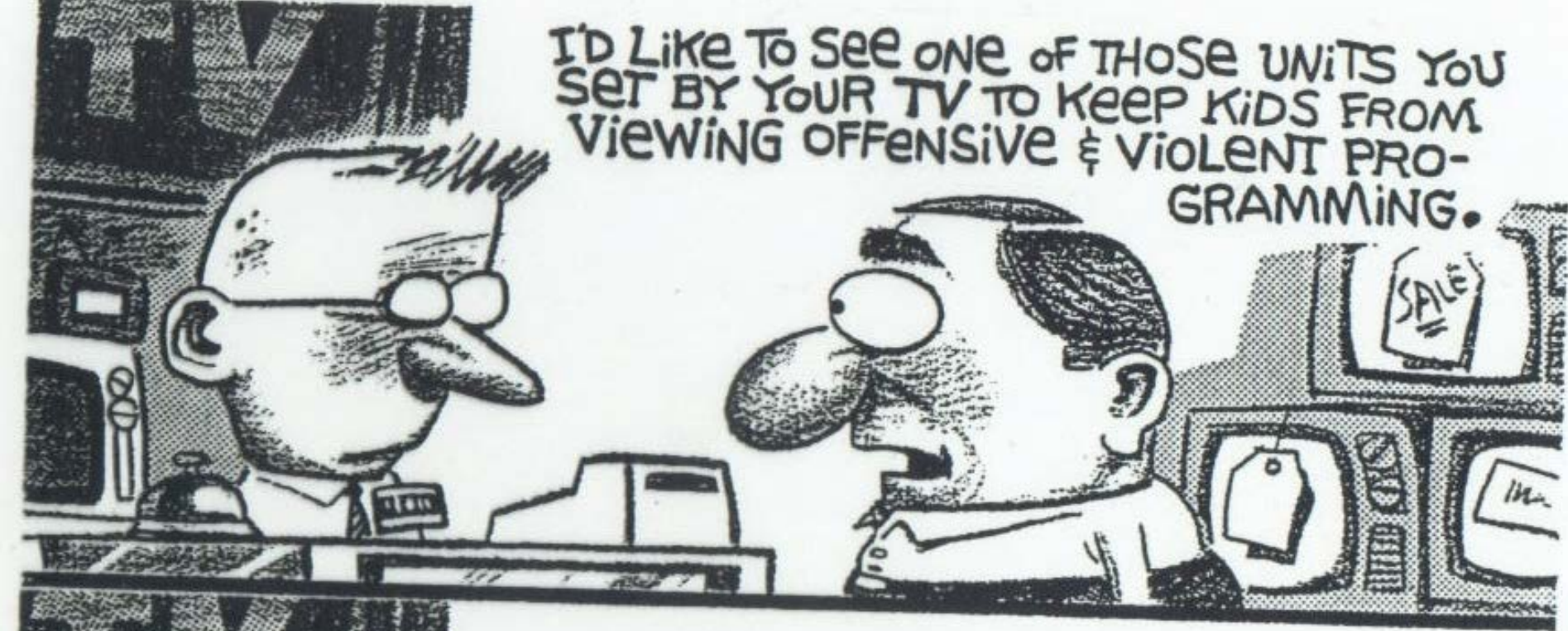
Core principles in Social Networking

- As noted, offer intense reward/ feedback loop: the '*Hyperpersonal Effect*'

- Now, an indispensible form of 'social currency'

- The *Zeigarnik Effect* – need of working models for closure…. 'The Never-Ending Story'

- Key concepts (Prof. R Putnam) of *Bridging* and *Bonding*

- SN differs from *Gaming* in that it *enhances* one's 'real life' socialising, vs. a 'virtual space'.

- Generally, gaming has more 'addiction' and harmful effects.

Adolescent sleep and IT usage

- Sleep medicine now a major clinical area

- Circadian Rhythm Disorders/ Delayed Sleep-Phase Disorder

- Emission spectrum from IT is at UV – wake drive highly susceptible

- Psychological aspects of 'sleep hygiene'

PIU and Physical Health

- Key relevant domains are sleep, weight, and physical activity

- *Sleep:* clear, strong recent evidence on suboptimal adolescent amount; link with m illness

- *Weight:* well-established concern. Link with both sleep and IT overuse

- *Physical activity:* ? effect of IT on adolescent levels; sport and outdoor engagement. Role of Wii and similar 'active' consoles

Emerging treatment models *(1):*

- Clearly, develop from both *theoretical* and *practical* experience

- CBT (group and individ.); behavioural; insight-oriented approaches

- Major & growing help/literature (? industry)

- **Key considerations:**

    - service provider/ specialist input; when to involve school counsellors.

    - individual vs. 'evidence- based'

    - out vs. in-patient

    - exogenous vs. endogenous drivers

Emerging treatment models *(2)* :

- From the 'Level 1 – 4' model as outlined:

    - Level 1 ~ 'in-house' efforts, self-help

    - Level 2 ~ associates, s/counsellor etc

    - Level 3 ~ clinical psychologist

    - Level 4 ('addiction') ~ psychiatric/ in-pt unit

        plus medication considerations

Treat the cause !!

Keys are insight and impact

The psychology of the Internet

- Evolving, though already large, area. Multi-disciplinary + collaborative

- Some emergent consensus

- New vs. established paradigms

- Key areas:

    identity/ social groupings (the Proteus effect)

    learning theory

    cultural perspectives (see below)

    gaming and social networking

    positive benefits

    ..... *relevance for DSM-V, due 2012*

The psychology of the Internet : ethno-cultural considerations

- 'Western' vs 'eastern' cultures (? simplistic)

- Probable higher intensity, severity and public concern in East (but note recent multi-centre study – D Gentile et al 2011). Numerous deaths in Asia vs one reported in England, 2011

- 'Hikikomori' phenomenon in Japan

- Economic-historical factors; urban living; physical/ metabolic differences; social pressures…

- Relevancies to Australia.... comparisons Sydney and ACT ?

The philosophy of the Internet: towards a coherent 'cyberphilosophy'

- Much less well-established, though clearly relevant.

- Existential, consumerist, transhumanistic issues

2 perspectives:

- Post-modern project: M Foucault, J-P Sartre, J Baudrillard – role of identity, authenticity and agency in an commercial-industrialised context, legacy of the 1960's movement

-' Future of humanity' project : Nietzsche; P Teilhard de Chardin and the 'expanded mind hypothesis' (Clark , Chalmers)

Are IT companies *intentionally* designing in 'addictive' features?

- A highly controversial point… SN interfaces include highly compelling user features

- Indisputable that Gaming employs core features 'learned' from Gambling industry

- Clive Thompson (*Wired*, 2007)… "The xxxx design lab looked more like a psychological research facility than a gaming company.."

- As ever, up to an *informed, engaged, empowered* stakeholder society to address these key issues

- If a product appears 'free' on the Internet… you probable *are* the product

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."