

PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE: clinical experience in Australian youth

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Outline of Session ...

- General overview & concept development
- The 'scale' of the problem – international perspectives & developments
- Current research, literature, debate
- Game design theory + relevance
- Assessment & appraisal of the problem: practical/ clinical
- Emerging 'treatment' options
- Social & multicultural aspects: Australian experience

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; at least 4 internatl. dedicated Journals
- Questionnaire development:
 - Goldberg 1996 (DSM addictive criteria)
 - Brenner 1997
 - Young DQ (IAT) 1998 (mod. Pathol. Gambling) – translated/ international
 - Porter, Starcevic et al - ANZJP Feb 2010
- > many others/ lack of theory or agreement - Hard / impossible, to devise the 'perfect' q'nnaire
- Key issue about 'addictiveness' as both a label and construct remains contentious

A suitable & concise definition:

- Problematic internet use: 'The pervasive, long-term usage by a person of ICT and related technologies, which results in a clinically significant impact in that persons daily functioning or role/expectation, and which persists despite efforts in the client, or in the social circle, to reduce that usage.'
- Note that PIU is a complex, 'end point' behaviour of a range of underlying psychiatric/ psychological stressors – maybe a 'disorder' in itself



Current Research Findings

- Varied data collection methods (internet-based, school or Uni, postal, clinics)
- Generally show 2-5% fulfil the criteria for addiction, up to 10% 'at risk'
- Dependent on strictness of criteria; almost all focus on gaming
- Lack of focus on antecedents to use and mental health issues (ie. no longitudinal studies)
- Recent international-comparison study (D Gentile, 2012) – note similar rates across centres.
- Recent moves to explore co-morbidities, chain of causation, and cross-cultural / parenting factors (Yan Yang *et al*, 2013)
- **Treatment** – emerging Level 2/3 evidence

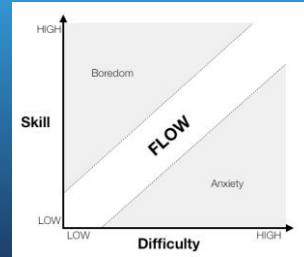
Core Gaming principles: *the 3 'Fs'*

- **FLOW**
- **FIRO**
- **FRUSTRATION** or 'FUN FAILURE'



...think of examples of 'successful games'!

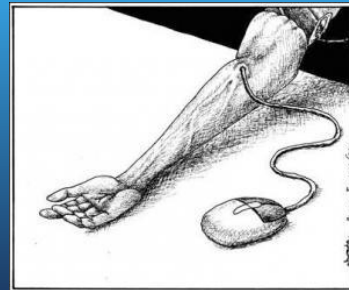
The 'Aristotleian Principle' (or 'engagement curve' in Flow Psychology) – adap. M. Csikszentmihalyi 1990



Core principles in Social Networking

- As noted, offer intense reward/ feedback loop: the 'Hyperpersonal Effect'
- Now, an indispensable form of 'social currency', espec. in females
- 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'.

But..... is it a real *addiction* ?



Examining the clinical problem (1)

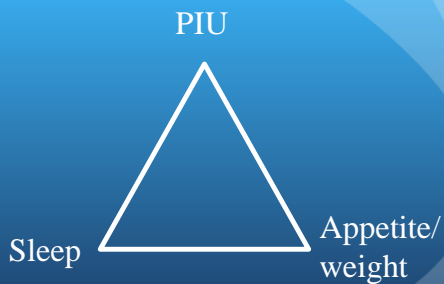
- Early warning signs
- Concept of the 'sentinel' or 'gateway' illness
- The 4 'levels' of PIU
 - Level 1 PIU* : mild impact, early problems, 'under the radar'
 - Level 2* : incr'd impact; social circle notices (schooling, peers etc.)
 - Level 3* : clinical impact; co-morbidity; specific intervention indicated
 - Level 4* : 'addiction', or pathological IU; major or whole social-role impact

Examining the clinical problem (2)

Associated co-morbidities

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>anxiety</i> | <i>depression</i> |
| <i>anomie</i> | <i>ADHD</i> |
| <i>Asperger's</i> | <i>Boredom</i> |

PIU and the physical “health triangle”



Australian Experience in PIU

- Well established that Aussie youth are highest consumers of social media/ networking, worldwide (AC Nielsen)
- National clinical experience suggests major emergent problems; extensive public & media interest
- Multicultural aspects in urban areas present unmet challenges
- GP and school counsellor studies (Tam *et al.*) indicate major concern/ desire to learn & engage more
- ACMA (2013 – in press): second analysis of ‘Click & Connect’ survey
- Other surveys : Young and Well CRC - Cybersafety

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:**
 - holistic assessment/ formulation vital
 - co-morbid : treat if necessary with medication
 - dependant on age of client, role of family important
 - 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 !! Use of the *IMPROVE* tool

Keys are insight and building rapport

The *IMPROVE* tool

- I** – Internet inventory (eg websites, games etc)
- M** – Monitor over time
- P** – Parenting factors (eg permissive vs authoritative)
- R** – Real world activities
- O** – Other factors (mental health issues, personal stress)
- V** – Vulnerability factors (eg personality traits, family issues)
- E** – Extra help needed?

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)
- ‘Hikikomori’ phenomenon in Japan
- Economic-historical factors; urban living; physical/ metabolic differences; social pressures
- Relevancies to Australia....

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

