Chapter 7.20
A Psychoanalytic Perspective of Internet Abuse

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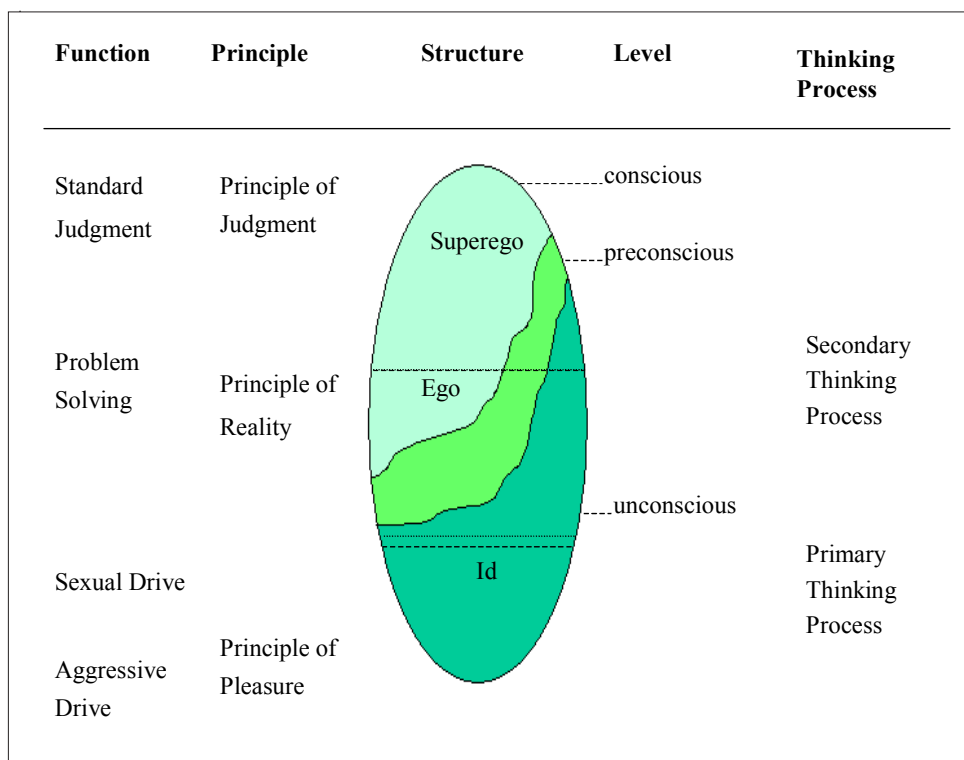*National Sun Yat-Sen University, Taiwan*

ABSTRACT

In this chapter I discuss Internet abuse from a psychoanalytic perspective. Internet abuse refers to the misuse of the Internet that leads to deterioration of both public and individual welfares. While past research has treated most computer abuse as the result of conscious decisions, the school of psychoanalysis provides insight into how the unconscious mind may influence one's abusive conduct. Therefore, I argue that effective resolution of Internet abuse requires the knowledge of the unconscious mind. Although modern knowledge of this domain is still limited, I believe that this orientation is beneficiary to the construction of social systems embedding the Internet and their application to our work.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in a wired society where information technologies have permeated every part of our lives. While we have cherished this achievement, we are also becoming increasingly vulnerable to various forms of computer abuse that infringe upon our basic rights of freedom of speech, privacy, properties, etc. To the professional IT managers in Taiwan, this abuse seems especially troublesome because of the Internet's huge popularity and its negative image portrayed by Taiwanese' public media. Indeed, the sorts of abuse that are seen in the newspapers almost daily are no longer matters like flaming and defamation, which we may call "Internet abuse in the small." Instead, the abuse is much broader in scope socially—gang fighting, broken families, wholesale piracy, and even murders, which we shall call "Internet abuse in the large." Should the company be held liable to those abuses, be they large or small, when employees utilizing the company's computing resources to commit them? To the IT professional managers, curbing Internet abuse becomes a new challenge because they are no longer dealing with problems that they can address with isolated intra-company policies. Rather, Internet abuse in the workplace is intricately linked to the world outside the company. The sources of the

Figure 1. Freud's structural model

Function	Principle	Structure	Level	Thinking Process
Standard Judgment	Principle of Judgment	Superego	conscious	
			preconscious	
Problem Solving	Principle of Reality	Ego		Secondary Thinking Process
			unconscious	
Sexual Drive		Id		Primary Thinking Process
Aggressive Drive	Principle of Pleasure			

abuse are societal and the challenge to understand them seems insurmountable.

Taiwan is rather unique in the adoption of the Internet. Its number of Internet users has grown from 400,000 in 1996 to an estimated six million by the end of 2000, according to statistics released by Taiwan's semi-official Institute of Information Industry (III, 2001). Over half of this Internet population are 30 years or younger, while another quarter belongs to the 30-something group. Almost two-thirds are college educated or equivalent, and over half access the Internet daily. One would think that such a population profile points to a healthy picture of Internet usage. Yet, according to YAM (http://www.yam.com), the civil watchdog of Taiwan's Internet, the most popular websites in 2000 are consistently services in which illegal transactions of sex, computer software, movies, and drugs are likely

to be conducted. Furthermore, in the year 2000, more than 90% of news pertaining to the Internet reported in the public media was negative, such as wholesale software piracy, sex trades, broken families, and gang fighting.

The Internet has been portrayed as the core engine empowering us to a state of the ultimate democracy and the friction-free (transaction cost-free) market. But in Taiwan, while none of these virtues are in sight, the society is seemingly already paying a price for this technology. Is this only a temporary but necessary step before transition into a better future? Or is the future already here? Or is information technology, however powerful it might be, only a slave of the culture in which it is implemented?

These are difficult questions to answer. They are difficult because the Internet is itself an evolving technology. They are difficult also

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