

WHY CUTE IS THE NEW PORN

Catherine Gray is a tough, no-nonsense girl – so why can't she stop watching internet clips of skateboarding kittens and puppies in teapots?



"Well, first off get yourself a good agent..."



My name's Catherine, and I'm an addict. But it's not booze or fags – I'm hooked on what I like to call kitsch porn. Whether it's a video of a toddler telling a story about

a monster with a thousand arms, or pictures of micro pigs playing in a doll's house, I can't stop surfing for my next hit.

Given how frequently I search for videos of small children, I'm surprised I haven't popped up yet on some police computer. I've also donated oh, probably a billion pounds to the RSPCA over the years. The animals can't die, because then there'd be no more videos. No sneezing pandas, no yawning slow lorises. Nada. It doesn't bear thinking about. Under my 'suggestions' on YouTube you won't find indie film trailers or mind-expanding documentary clips. Oh no. I'm currently looking at a donkra (a cross between a donkey and a zebra; like a foal in stripy legwarmers – SQUEAL!) and dancing children in bear outfits. I'm also totes in love with YouTube star Maru – a big fat cat who wears jam jars on his head, uses cereal boxes for skateboards and walks

around with paper bags over his head.

I'm 31, yet this is how I spend my time. But I'm not the girl who has a pink, fluffy pen top. I prefer rock climbing to yoga and thrillers to romcoms. And I'm not alone. Three of my friends – similarly non-sugary types – are also wrestling addictions. "My boss caught me watching Christian the lion again," admits Penny, 30. And Bridget, 29, is hooked on Twitter feed @preschool gems, which tweets priceless quotes from the mouths of babes, like, 'I'm at my house, I can take off my pants. When you can get to your house you can take off your pants.' Sarah, 27, is even risking alienating her boyfriend. "We watch TV in separate rooms," she says. "He says it's strange that all I want to watch is *Animals Do The Funniest Things*. But where's the fun in programmes about Mexican gang lords?"

So what's driving this? Are we so scared of reality we have to immerse ourselves in a world where kittens rule? "Anyone

'Are we so scared of reality we have to immerse ourselves in a world where kittens rule?'

can fall into this addiction," says Dr Hilarie Cash, who runs internet-addiction recovery programme Restart. "All addictions are driven by escapism, and this is a way of evading daily stresses, like work or money. And with a smartphone, you're literally carrying your addiction around like a hip flask."

Scientists have also found that looking at baby pictures triggers a chemical reaction in the same part of the brain that responds when you have sex or eat nice food. This is a relief. It's not me, it's my nucleus thingummy! But does that mean I need to go to cutesy rehab?

"If you're compelled to click even when you shouldn't – say if you're at work or running late – then it's approaching a problem," warns Dr Cash. "Try a technology fast." So, it seems I've got to go cold turkey (although cold duckling sounds much cuter). Wish me luck – but if you hear Maru's been catnapped, you'll know I've fallen off the wagon... ♦