

# THE AUSTRALIAN

**AS a researcher in pharmacology at Oxford University, you've worked on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Once we conquer such diseases, 100 will be the new 70.**

Yes, and the question then becomes: what are we going to do with the second 50 years of life? We should be rethinking old age in positive ways, rather than just killing time with golf or Sudoku.

**You've expressed concern about the impact of information technology on childhood development. Your evidence?**

Evidence is irrefutable that kids are spending a lot of time on computers, and every hour spent in front of a computer is an hour not spent doing something else. If you do it obsessively to the exclusion of other things you need to ask questions. There is strong evidence of addiction. Also, three-quarters of a group of 400 school teachers in Britain found that there was a decline in attention span among students, and much less reading. And I haven't even got to the science.



Baroness Professor Susan Greenfield: "An inspirational teacher is worth 10,000 iPads." *Source: The Australian*

**What does the science say?**

A recent study in China reveals a high correlation between internet addiction and abnormal brain scans. There's another that reveals [in people with internet addiction] an enlarged area of the brain that releases the chemical dopamine comparable to that in compulsive gamblers.

**How does the brain generate consciousness?**

My own view of consciousness is that it grows as brains grow, and this means that anything with a rudimentary nervous system will have some kind of consciousness. Think of it as a dimmer switch - it varies in degrees.

**What does Qualia mean?**

Qualia touches on the feature of consciousness that makes scientists so uncomfortable - the subjective element. It means the experience of, say, redness that you are experiencing and that I cannot share.

**Your academic life was launched with a PhD but how did the peerage come about?**

In 2001, Tony Blair introduced a scheme for the appointment of independent peers without any political affiliation in the House of Lords. Nominations were invited and I was interviewed by politicians from both parties; to my delight and surprise I was appointed.

**Were you good at science at school?**

I was terrible. I found it really boring. But I loved classics and had an inspirational teacher in Ancient Greek; an inspirational teacher is worth 10,000 iPads. At Oxford I did philosophy and psychology and started science from there.

**You are coming to Melbourne to talk about technology and the mind at the Creative Innovation conference. Can I describe you as a pin-up girl for science?**

[Laughs] I suppose I'm flattered, though it's probably not a feminist thing to say.

**For a neuroscientist, you're known as a snappy dresser. Do you have a favourite designer?**

That's a very important question [laughs]. I like Alannah Hill and every time I come to Australia I stock up on her clothes. I also like Armani, Vivienne Westwood and Topshop.

**Between the House of Lords, the lab and the lecture circuit, what do you do for fun?**

I love hanging out with my mates and sharing a bottle of champagne on my terrace on the rare evening when it's warm enough to sit outside in England. I'm addicted to squash and play four times a week. And there's the shopping.

*The Creative Innovation conference runs from November 28-30*