

# Stonebriar Psychiatric Services News & Views

## Compulsive Shopping

FEBRUARY, 2007

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2



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### Services We Offer

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### Treatment for

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Obsessive –  
Compulsive  
Disorder  
Compulsive Behaviors  
such as sexual  
addiction  
Post-traumatic Stress  
Disorder from  
past abuse  
Relational issues  
Adjustment to life  
changes

### Ages Served

Adult  
Adolescent  
Children ages 10 & up

## "When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Go Shopping."

I'm sure that many of you have either seen or heard this expression and quietly chuckled. Although I cannot verify the source, I have heard that the North Dallas - Plano area has more shops and places to shop per capita than anywhere else in the country, and I would suspect that Frisco and McKinney will soon be right on their heels. Many of you will see that trend as nothing but a good thing, feeling that anything you need or want is right here and convenient to get to so you can save both on sales and on gas. But for others this can potentially be a tragedy waiting to happen.

Jill (not her real name) was a 42-year-old, attractive, very smart, and very successful professional who made a six-figure income and yet was constantly worried about getting notices from bill collectors or being informed while shopping at Nordstrom's or the Galleria that her \$60,000 credit card limit was maxed out. That was only on one credit card. Jill, who managed other people's money quite effectively, was spending much of her income servicing credit card debt, paying 15-20% interest rates, and yet still finding it impossible to stop herself from buying that beautiful Gucci purse and pair of Prada shoes when it was such a great sale. There is also John, who is still a student and does not yet have the six-figure income, yet finds it difficult to walk through any electronics store without buying the latest gadget or gizmo. He struggles and worries constantly about debt, as he has spent most of his student loans for the next semester on one of the best stereo systems in the campus dorm. He couldn't resist... it was top-rated and was a great buy.

Many of you that are reading this may simply conclude that these individuals just do not know how to manage money. But it actually can go far beyond that. For some, they know that they spend too much on things that they really do not need and yet find themselves unable to stop. These individuals may be struggling with what is known as compulsive shopping or compulsive buying disorder. Although it is well recognized by professionals, and I'm sure that most of us have at least several patients if not more in our practice that struggle with this, it does not have an official diagnosis in the DSM-IV-TR, but rather is simply called an "impulse control disorder, not otherwise specified." Interestingly, it was not until I began doing further research for this newsletter that I discovered that it had originally been referred to as *oniomania* by Emil Kraepelin and Eugen Bleuler, who did much of their psychiatric study and writing in the late 1800s and early 1900s. That means that this has been around for quite some time.

## What Is "Compulsive Buying Disorder?"

Compulsive buying disorder might be defined as a type of impulse control disorder in which one is frequently preoccupied with buying or shopping or is subject to irresistible, intrusive, and frequently senseless impulses to buy various objects. Frequently the individual will purchase unneeded items or items that he or she really cannot afford or will often shop for periods longer than originally intended. The person will then generally tend to experience negative consequences such as extreme distress, financial problems, or interference with one's social or occupational functioning. As with most compulsive behaviors, it often is experienced not as something one wants to do but rather something one is unable to control.

In contrast to previous thinking, a recent study in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* which conducted a structured telephone survey on over 2500 adults, indicated a fairly similar incidence in men and women. They reported it occurring in approximately 6% of women and 5.5% of men in this study. This

study found certain differences in purchases, which has also been consistent with my clinical experience. Men tended to buy more electronic gadgets, tools, books, and what some women would probably refer to as their "expensive toys", whereas women tended to buy clothes, makeup, craft items, and various objects for the home. These patterns are associated with significant financial consequences regardless of one's income group. The affected individuals were more likely to have credit cards near their credit limit and were four times as likely to make only the minimum payment on their balances. One reported aspect that was different from what I have found, but which may be more reflective of those who do or do not seek clinical help, was that they tended to be younger and more likely to have reported incomes under \$50,000. My experience has been that it can affect individuals of all ages and all income levels.

In the above mentioned study it was found that approximately one quarter to one third of the compulsive buyers also had major depression, although they could not specify which came first. It certainly has been recognized that some individuals who are depressed may try to ease that depression through shopping, but I assure you that this is at best a temporary solution and frequently, as is evident from this newsletter, may make things much worse. Other frequent comorbid conditions include various anxiety disorders as well as certain other impulse control disorders, such as trichotillomania (compulsive hair pulling), compulsive gambling, and compulsive picking at one's skin. For this diagnosis to occur, it also must not be associated with the manic or hypomanic behavior of bipolar disorders (see previous newsletters), which also can include impulsive and excessive spending.



Do you have topical requests for future newsletters? Let us know at: NewsletterQuestions@stonebriarps.com



## Treatment

Although there have been a limited number of controlled studies regarding the treatment of compulsive buying disorders, there has been fairly strong suggestive evidence for the success of certain of the antidepressants, particularly the SSRIs, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), or a combination of the two. This would also tend to be similar regarding the treatment of many compulsive disorders, as well as many other impulse control disorders. Some of the SSRIs for which studies have been done include fluvoxamine (Luvox), citalopram (Celexa), and escitalopram (Lexapro). As is the case in a number of other disorders, the other SSRIs might likely be as effective even if not formally confirmed in extensive studies. Dr. Lorrin Koran, who carried out the above mentioned study, also noted improvement in two patients, who did not respond to SSRIs, when he tried naltrexone (ReVia). This is a medication that has been used with alcohol and drug abuse, as well as certain other compulsive disorders, with varying degrees of success.

Although some may not want to categorize such things as compulsive shopping, gambling, or sexual behavior as addictions, they nonetheless have many of the characteristics associated with the more traditional addictions, such as alcohol or drugs. They tend to be associated with emotional tension before the behavior, pleasure or gratification during the act, but then remorse and guilt feelings afterwards; yet, in spite of the negative consequences, the behaviors continue.

Although compulsive buying disorder can wreck havoc on one's finances and relationships, let alone one's emotional state, treatment is often effective. But as with many other problems, the first step is recognizing it as a problem and not just a quirk of one's personality or character... nor is it just a consequence of living in the North Texas area. The fact is, it can occur in Cleveland, Cedar Rapids, or anywhere in between.



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