COMPULSIVE BUYING

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Excessive impulses to shop for unneeded items and buying behavior that leads to personal, social or financial distress (also referred to as compulsive buying disorder or oniomania)

Characterized by:

- Preoccupation with shopping
- Feelings of tension or anxiety prior to purchase
- Sense of relief following purchase

(Black, 2007)
Four Stages of Compulsive Buying

1) **Anticipation** - individual develops pre-occupation with possessing a particular item or with buying in general

2) **Preparation** - individual begins preparing for their shopping trip (deciding where to go, how to dress, how to pay for purchases, etc.)

3) **Shopping** - individual physically goes shopping for desired items and experiences feeling powerful, euphoric or “high” during this stage

4) **Spending** - individual purchases items, usually followed by feelings of disappointment, guilt and distress. (individual may even hide purchases, never to be used)

(Black, 2007)
Affects between 2%-8% of U.S. population
Roughly 90% of those affected are females
Age of onset is late teens or early twenties (age where people leave home and begin to establish credit)
75% of compulsive buyers prefer to shop alone (due to shame or embarrassment)
74% of compulsive buyers feel “out of control” while shopping

(Marcinko, Karlović, 2005)
Currently included in DSM-IV as “impulse control disorder, not otherwise specified” (ICD-NOS)

For DSM-V experts are considering including compulsive buying under the category of “Obsessive Compulsive Spectrum Disorders” (OCSD)

Based on the premise that other obsessive compulsive disorders are characterized by repetitive thoughts or behaviors, similarly to compulsive buying

(First, 2006)
Compulsive buyers are more likely (than non-compulsive buyers) to also experience anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance use disorders and impulse control disorders.

Nearly 60% of compulsive shoppers meet DSM criteria for personality disorders, most common being:
- Obsessive-compulsive (22%)
- Borderline (15%)
- Avoidant (15%)

(Dell’Osso, Allen, Altamura, Buoli, Hollander, 2008)
Why People Compulsively Buy

- **Developmental View**: early life events could be contributing factors
  Tends to run in families

- **Neurobiological View**: disturbed neurotransmission of serotonin, dopamine or opioid systems
  - Dopamine could contribute to reward system in the brain

- **Cultural View**: more prevalent in developed countries due to:
  - Market based economy
  - Availability of variety goods
  - Disposable income
  - Leisure time
  - Shopping is a socially acceptable “fun” activity

*The most common reason people compulsively buy* is a result of negative emotions (depression, anxiety, boredom, self-critical thoughts, anger).

(Black, 2007)
Treatments

- Medications: anti-depressants (for individuals with co-occurring depression)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Financial counseling
- Self-help books
- Debtors Anonymous (12-step program similar to AA)

(Kuzma, 2006)
Are You a Compulsive Buyer?

Identification with 4 or more of these behaviors indicates a possible problem with shopping or spending:

- Shopping or spending money as result of feeling disappointed, angry, or scared
- Shopping or spending habits causing emotional distress in one's life
- Having arguments with others about one's shopping or spending habits
- Feeling lost without credit cards
- Buying items on credit that would not be bought with cash
- Feeling a rush of euphoria and anxiety when spending money
- Feeling guilty, ashamed, embarrassed, or confused after shopping or spending money
- Lying to others about purchases made or how much money was spent
- Thinking excessively about money
- Spending a lot of time juggling accounts or bills to accommodate spending

Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery (Moore, 2003)
“My shopping addiction” is an actual show on the Oxygen channel

Here is a short clip featuring two of the “shopping addicts” from the show:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2YAhsoUv7w
How is Compulsive Buying Similar to Chemical Addiction?

- Behavior is excessive
- Person experiences “loss of control”
- Negative consequences (financial distress, problems w/ interpersonal relationships)
- High rates of co-morbidity
- Person has mental pre-occupation with behavior
- Used as an “escape” from reality
- Short-term positive reinforcement
- Treatment with medication, therapy and 12-step program
How Does Compulsive Buying Differ from Chemical Addiction?

- No actual substance being used
- Can’t overdose on shopping
- Physical health won’t suffer
- Can’t physically withdraw from shopping
- No legal consequences (unless shoplifting)
- No medication specifically for compulsive buyers. Anti-depressants only proven to be useful in people with co-occurring depression
Yes, I think compulsive shopping can be recognized as a form of addiction if the compulsive buyer:

- Experiences loss of control
- Experiences negative consequences as a result of their excessive buying
- Is unable to stop despite multiple attempts
- Is pre-occupied with buying/spending to the point where it interferes with their daily life
- Is using shopping as a way to escape reality
References


