Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects

2006

Understanding compulsive buying: The dimensions and management of addictive shopping

Andrew Richard Wilczaki

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.emich.edu/theses

Part of the Sociology Commons

UNDERSTANDING COMPULSIVE BUYING:

THE DIMENSIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF ADDICTIVE SHOPPING

By

Andrew Richard Wilczak

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Criminology

Thesis Committee:

Roger Kernsmith, PhD, Chair

Jay Weinstein, PhD.

July 2006

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

For Jenny, who made all of this possible.

Abstract

Drawing on messages collected from an internet support group, this paper examines the motivations and dimensions of compulsive shopping as an addictive disorder. Two thousand nonrandom internet messages were collected and subjected to content analyses, resulting in a final sample of 197 subjects. Factor analyses and logistical regression models found varying motivations for compulsive shopping that were not mutually exclusive: the need to escape and the need to fill a void. Subsequently, compulsive shoppers with these motivations were found to manage their shopping differently, specifically in terms of help-seeking behaviors and organizational behaviors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction

Compulsive shopping (CS), defined as the uncontrollable urge to shop (McElroy, 1994), has increased substantially over the past several generations (Roberts and Manolis, 2000). It is possible that there is a relationship between this increased self-identification as a compulsive shopper and the recent change in societal attitudes toward material gain (Easterlin and Crimmens, 1997) as well as the substantial growth of the credit card industry and decline in personal financial responsibility (The Credit Card and Debt Statistics database; Sullivan, Warren, and Westbrook, 2001). Psychological research indicates that depression (Black, Repertinger, Gaffney and Gabel, 1997) and escapism (Faber and Vohs, 2004; Baumeister, 1990) may be connected to compulsive shopping. Several sociological and criminological theories may also be used in reference to compulsive shopping (Veblen, 1899; Merton (1949 [1957]; Becker (1963 [1991]; Gove and Wilmoth (1990); Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

In this study, the experiences of CS as discussed by the people who live with the problem are examined via collection of data from an internet discussion forum. This group was designed to give compulsive shoppers an opportunity to not only share their concerns about CS but also discuss and debate its causes, share ideas about how to beat it, and show any new visitors to the forum suffering from CS that they are not alone. The following is the group's mission statement:

> This is a group for people who are addicted to shopping or think they might be addicted to shopping to help and support each other.
>
> People hear "shopping addict" and they laugh but it destroys lives as your credit card debt mounts. You feel depressed if you can't go shopping, and you shop to help yourself feel happy and fulfilled.

> If this sounds like you, and you'd like to have people around you to help and support you, please join this group!
>
> Note: this group is NOT for people who really like to shop and want to chat about purchases, this is for people who have a problem and are trying to overcome it. This is also not Debtors Anonymous. They are a more traditional 12 step program. This is a support group where we can chat and offer each other advice or just a sympathetic ear.

These messages were recorded in a secure database where they have been studied using content analysis.

The goal of this study is to explore several broad research questions as a means of developing a better understanding of CS. First, is CS truly an addiction? Second, is CS something that cuts across class, race, and gender lines, or is there a specific group of people who are more likely than others to develop it? Third, assuming men and women are both affected by CS, do they experience CS is similar ways, or are they addicted in different ways?

Literature Review

Social Trends, Consumption, and Compulsive Shopping

To determine if the importance of personal material gain was changing over time, a similar study was conducted by Easterlin and Crimmens (1997). Data were analyzed from two national US surveys, one focused on high school seniors (Monitoring the Future, a comparison between samples taken in 1976 and 1986) and the other on college freshmen (Cooperative Institutional Research Program, 1966-1985). The authors found that there was a substantial increase in the value of personal material gain among the respondents.

In conjunction with the changing attitude toward material gain, statistics show that levels of personal financial stability are declining. In 1990, the typical U.S. household saved 7.8% of its income, while in 1999 it spent 0.1% more than it earned (Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database). In 2000, total household debt was more than 100% of the nation's total disposable income, while in 1980, the ratio was approximately two-thirds (ibid). This figure includes credit cards, car loans, mortgages, and student loans.

The growth of the credit card industry is another important dimension to be considered. In 2001, the typical U.S. household had an average credit card balance of $7,500, up from $3,000 in 1990 (Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database). That same year, the national balance on credit cards and other non-mortgage related debt was a record high $1.58 trillion (http://credit.about.com/cs/frugality/a/081001.htm). A 2002 report indicates that credit card spending had increased by 8.1% in the first half of the year, and approximately 5% of consumers were late with their payments (ibid). In 2004, the percentage of delinquent accounts rose by 0.7% from the previous year to an all-time

high of 5%, and 6.4% of all credit card balances were written off as being "uncollectible" (http://credit.about.com/cs/frugality/a/081001.htm).

In addition to this growth in the average credit card balance, the rate of issuance of credit cards has also increased. In 1980, 56% of American adults carried at least one credit card. By 2000, 76% of adults carried more than one card (Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database).

The availability of credit cards is not restricted to certain segments of the population. Levesque-Ware (2002) discusses the availability of credit cards to undergraduate students, as well as the financial and ethical implications of making so much money readily available to a segment of the population that is so economically fragile. In 2001, approximately one in four students with credit card debt owed more than $3,000. Nearly 10% of students owed more than $7,000 (Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database).

A common result of unchecked credit card use is personal bankruptcy. Sullivan, Warren, and Westbrook (2001) explored this topic in terms of the middle class experience in the United States during the 1990s. The authors found that while it was a prosperous time for the nation, the number of personal bankruptcies increased dramatically during this period, due in part to credit card debt. This conclusion is supported by the Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database, which states that personal bankruptcies nearly doubled during the 1990s to 1.2 million per year, with credit card debt as the significant factor.

The role of personal bankruptcy in CS falls under scrutiny when new laws are taken into consideration. In October 2005, due to a rising belief that people were abusing the bankruptcy laws – using them to avoid paying debts that they could easily manage – a

new law was passed that made it more difficult to declare personal bankruptcy. Under the new law, anyone wishing to file for bankruptcy must first undergo credit counseling to prove that they actually do need the protection offered by bankruptcy.

According to *The Washington Post*, since the law has gone into effect, the number of avoidable bankruptcies has been far less than originally estimated. It is estimated that 1% to 5% of those who have filed for bankruptcy have had the resources to pay off their debts. Twenty-one percent of those who filed did so due to circumstances that were deemed to be under their control. This does not include job loss, major medical expenses, or the death of a spouse (Singletary, 2006). This is likely the category that CS would fall into, though there is no reason to assume that it cannot happen in conjunction with something else, such as a person who loses his or her job but continues to shop needlessly.

These changes in the nature of consumerism are important in respect to compulsive shopping in that the increased availability of credit and personal value of material goods has allowed for some segment of the population to develop a problematic compulsion toward conspicuous consumption. In order to determine if compulsive shopping was becoming more prevalent, Roberts and Manolis (2000) examined 1,393 subjects across two cohorts. The first cohort was classified as "baby boomers" (born between 1946 and 1964). The second cohort was classified as "baby busters" (born between 1965 and 1976). Seven percent of the first group and eleven percent of the second were classified as compulsive shoppers.

Research on Compulsive Shopping

Researchers disagree on the definition of CS. This is a direct result of the difficulty in developing an operational distinction between compulsive shopping and compulsive spending. Boundy (2000) argues that CS is actually a subgroup of a larger compulsion: compulsive spending. The other four subgroups are image spenders, bargain hunters, codependent spenders, and bulimic spenders. In regard to CS, Boundy states that "for compulsive shoppers the main (unconscious) purpose is using the stimulation and distraction of shopping to avoid unwanted feelings." Boundy (2000) goes onto argue that CS is continually perpetuating itself, a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy:

> While in the act, the compulsive shopper often feels a sense of well-being, excitement, and control. But after the spree, as this woman drives home or puts away the goods, she begins to feel anxious and guilty about how much she's spent, vaguely let down that the new items aren't magically transforming her moods or life, and ashamed that she can't seem to get her spending under control. In short, she emerges from the experience 'spent.' Her cravings to shop are then fanned by this complex of uncontrollable feelings, and thus the cycle perpetuates itself (2000: 8).

Another alternative approach is proposed by Campbell (2000), who makes a distinction between compulsive shoppers and compulsive spenders. "Shopaholics are those people who seem to be addicted to the activity of shopping itself, unrelated to the buying or the having of an object; spendaholics are people who are addicted to spending and for whom the shopping activity is usually quite secondary." In other words, there is the possibility of two mutually exclusive addictions centered on shopping: physically spending money regardless of what is being purchased, and purchasing desired items regardless of the price.

The difficulty in discerning a difference between compulsive spending and compulsive shopping is addressed by Benson (2000). Benson argues that there is too much confusion in trying to differentiate between compulsive shopping and compulsive spending, and instead refers to a larger disorder: compulsive buying. She offers the following definition, originally developed by McElroy and her associates in 1994, as a means to avoid any uncertainty in the difference between compulsive shoppers and compulsive spenders:

> The most widely used definitional criteria define the disorder, in essence, as maladaptive preoccupation with buying or shopping, whether impulses or behavior, that either (1) is experienced as irresistible, intrusive, and/or senseless or (2) results in frequent buying of more than can be afforded or of items that are not needed, or shopping for longer periods of time than intended. The buying preoccupations, impulses, or behaviors cause marked distress, are time consuming, significantly interfere with social or occupational functioning, or result in financial problems, and they do not occur exclusively during periods of hypomania or mania. In short, the compulsive buyer is a person who allows shopping to destructively deflect resources – whether of time, energy, or money – from the fabrication of everyday life (1994: xxv).

A similar definition is established by Black (2000). "Compulsive buying is a behavioral syndrome characterized by excessive and inappropriate shopping and spending that creates personal distress or impairment in one or more life domains" (2000: 191). In either case, it appears that compulsive buying and compulsive shopping may be used interchangeably as long as no attempt to establish compulsive spending as an independent disorder is made.

The emotional element of CS is utilized in the definition constructed by Faber (2000). He defines it as "chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative feelings and that provides immense immediate short-term gratification, but that ultimately causes harm to the individual and/or others" (2000: 29). Faber argues that the

key point of this definition is that the behavior is repetitive to the point where the subject

goes shopping every day and becomes very anxious if she does not on any particular day.

CS appears to be a problem that primarily affects women. Black (2001) found that

95% of the people suffering from CS are female. This gender difference in attitude

toward shopping was addressed by Dittmar, Long, and Meek (2004), and built upon

earlier research by Dittmar and Drury (2000). This research shows that women have

vastly different attitudes than men in regard to shopping, putting them more at risk to

become compulsive shoppers.

The question of gender differences in regard to attitudes toward shopping was further

explored by Campbell (2000). Campbell states that women tend to view the act of

shopping in a more positive light, while men consider it to be more of a chore.

Furthermore, the popular association between shopping and femininity could explain why

many men have a negative opinion of shopping, though men did enjoy shopping for

specific products, such as electronic equipment (ibid). The concept of browsing was also

brought up in the research; men typically responded positively to the idea of going to a

book or music store and browsing without purchasing, while women considered browsing

a part of the overall shopping experience (ibid). Benson (2000) does not speak about CS

as an exclusively female compulsion, but rather that men and women experience the

desire to shop differently, typically focusing on gender-specific items: "Women value

more their emotional and symbolic possessions, while men favor functional and leisure

items" (2000: 500).

In a study of 33 compulsive shoppers in a 1998 study, Black et al. found that people

with CS were more likely to have lifetime mood disorders, including major depression,

and to have more than one psychiatric disorder. Also, immediate relatives of compulsive buyers were more likely to suffer from depression, alcoholism, and drug addiction, in addition to more psychiatric disorders in general.

The relationship between depression and CS was also examined in a study conducted by Lejoyeux et al. (1997) of 119 people hospitalized with major depression. The authors determined that 38 of them suffered from CS. These people were typically young unmarried women who were more likely to have disorders associated with a deficiency in self-control, such as kleptomania. Similar research was done by LaRose and Eastin (2002) using 218 university students. The authors determined that the existence of CS is questionable and only conceded to it in the face of self-efficacy issues that arose in their research. Their final conclusion was that depression has no direct link to unchecked spending.

Faber, who was originally convinced that CS stemmed from a lack of self-control (2000), found that CS was a result of other emotions. In a study of CS, Faber found that 73.9 % of their population was more likely to buy something after experiencing a negative emotion. This finding was also reported by Arenson (1991), who states that the act of spending money was a form of relaxation, a way for the spender to forget his or her problems.

Potential Applications of Social Theory in Understanding Compulsive Shopping

There are a number of potential theories that could be applied to CS. These include theories from the fields of psychology, criminology, sociology, and socio-biology. Though the grounded theory method will prevent the data from being applied to a single theoretical approach, the inclusion of several theories as possible means of understanding the patterns of the data is still appropriate as long as other potential explanations are not ignored.

Psychological

One approach to CS argues that it is a means of avoiding the frustrations of daily life. This argument comes from escape theory (Faber and Vohs, 2004), originally formulated by Baumeister (1988) in his study of masochism as an escape of self-awareness and later expanded in his application of this idea in a study of suicide (Baumeister (1990). Escape theory was formulated as a hybrid of self-awareness theory and action identification theory. According to escape theory, CS is the result of shoppers needing a way to escape from, or mask, their own self-awareness and the reality of their lives. This perspective says that those suffering from CS are falling down a slippery slope: they recognize that they have a problem with CS, but the only way that they know of to make themselves forget the problem is to sink deeper into it.

Sociological Theories

The first contribution to the sociology of consumption can be credited to Veblen (1899). His 1899 thesis, "Theory of the Leisure Class," examines the origin and evolution of the upper class. Veblen argues that the upper class is the group that is exempt from hard labor. Because of this, the upper class became admired within society,

while belonging to the working or labor class became a negative characteristic and considered a barrier to social mobility. In time, the idea of hard labor became vulgar, which made it that much more important for people to make it obvious to their peers that they belonged to the upper class.

Veblen goes on to argue that conspicuous consumption became the symbol of being a member of the upper-class. Members of the upper-class consumed more than necessary to prove to those around them that they were economically successful enough to engage in what might be otherwise considered impractical and wasteful behavior. Given this perspective, CS can be interpreted as an extreme expression of the need to exhibit conspicuous consumption. This is also consistent with escape theory (Baumeister, 1990), as the act of shopping provides the emotional relief directly because of the social meaning that Veblen identified.

The issue of shopping as a status-seeking activity is addressed by Vance Packard in his 1959 work, "The Status Seekers." Packard (1959) observes that "most of us surround ourselves, wittingly or unwittingly, with status symbols we hope will influence the raters appraising us, and which we hope will establish some social distance between ourselves and those we consider below us" (1959: 7). Packard goes on to argue that there is a segment of the population that has become abnormally concerned with their social status:

> Many people are badly distressed, and scared, by the anxieties, inferiority feelings, and straining generated by this unending process of rating and status striving. The status seekers, as I use the term, are people who are continually straining to surround themselves with visible evidence of the superior rank they are claiming (1959: 7).

Packard goes on to claim that the act of shopping has become a popular activity due to unprecedented levels of dissatisfaction among those in the workplace (1959). This lack

of pride in one's work has resulted in a large proportion of society having to find satisfaction outside of work and doing so via conspicuous consumption. Applied to CS, this perspective indicates that the compulsion may be the result of the desire for upward social mobility. This is similar to the perspective of Veblen (1899).

The subject of the mental health and well-being of the status seekers is also addressed. Citing the work of Hollingshead and Redlich, Packard (1959) argues that there are two types of status seekers: the climbers, who achieve some success, and the strainers, who achieve little success, in spite of their aspirations. Packard observes that in conjunction with upward social mobility, the climbers often find themselves in new situations that are beyond their emotional capabilities, which results in their suffering from severe depression and anxiety. Conversely, the strainers "are dreamers and schemers, rushing from one pursuit to another" (1959: 261).

The popularization of debt in America is addressed by Packard in his 1960 work, "The Waste Makers." Here, Packard observes that it has not only become popular to live with substantial debt, but it is also considered patriotic (1960). He relates a story from the *Sales Credit News* that chastises a young couple for paying their debts prior to getting married, postponing the marriage for two years, which "deprived the national economy of two or more years of family consumption," in spite of the considerable strain insolvency would put on the relationship (1960: 156). This popularization of debting is credited to the federal government:

> When worried economists urged the curbing of easy credit, merchants and manufacturers protested that it would slow down sales and invite a depression. They quite probably were recalling the admonitions of Washington to buy instead of save during the recession of 1958 (1960: 157).

This popularization of debt and consumption is another possible explanation of CS. It is possible that CS developed out of a desire to be seen as good consumers and, consequently, good citizens and good people.

Packard proposes another possible explanation: CS is the product of national advertising that instructs consumers to indulge themselves, and actively attacks society's puritanical beliefs to make this culture of self-indulgence more acceptable (1960). This self-indulgence was not limited to buying newer and more expensive goods but included impulsive purchases as well (1960).

Conflict theory can also be utilized. The argument developed here is that the existing system has become reified (Ahrne, 1974; Jarrett, 2003) and the core beliefs of the system accepted by even its most ardent detractors (Wolff, 2005), in spite of their increasing alienation. "Alienation may be described as a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers," according to Coser (1977: 50). The rising level of consumption within society is a means of compensating the people for the exploitation and other negative aspects of society (Wolff, 2005).

In relation to CS, conflict theory argues that this is a segment of the population that has accepted the values of the current system completely and without question. Because of their complete acceptance and reification of the system, they are incapable of viewing it as one of the core reasons for their suffering. Therefore, in an attempt to alleviate their own suffering, they begin to consume at an extraordinarily high level. Since the items they purchase and the time they spend shopping can provide only a temporary relief from their suffering, they must continue to turn to this activity. This is similar to the application of escape theory to CS (Young, 2004).

Criminological

Labeling theory approaches the problem of CS in terms of the self-image of shoppers. Becker (1963 [1991]) states that the label of deviancy affects how people see themselves, influencing their future behavior, including increasing the likelihood that they are going to commit deviant acts. Once the label has successfully been applied, the subjects begin to see themselves as others do, thus increasing their deviancy. In time, the deviant identification becomes the dominant one (ibid). Applied to CS, it could be argued that CS exists primarily because the subjects have been told they have a shopping problem, and the process perpetuates as they begin to view themselves as a shopping addict and behave consistently with the expectations of others.

A second possible application of labeling would be that the subjects view themselves as belonging to the upper class, and therefore as people who need to be surrounded by an excess of material goods in order to reinforce their idea that they belong to the upper class. This is consistent with Veblen's theory of the leisure class who argued that conspicuous consumption became a characteristic of the upper class, and that the appearance of being economically successful is a driving force in everyday life. This concept of the "upper class" as defined by Veblen is a label that can be easily applied to and perpetuated by someone desiring to be in the upper class. In either case, CS is a self-fulfilling expectation.

The General Theory of Crime (GTC), developed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), is another potential theoretical perspective that may be applied to this research. The GTC argues that criminal behavior can be explained by the absence of self-control, which is the result of poor socialization as children. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that

oftentimes, criminal acts provide immediate gratification of desires. Because a primary characteristic of people with low self-control is a tendency to respond to immediate, tangible stimuli, they often have a 'here and now' orientation. People with high self-control, in contrast, tend to defer gratification (1990).

According to this theoretical approach, CS is the result of inadequate self-control and the inability to delay gratification. The authors state that "the major benefit of many crimes is not pleasure but relief from momentary irritation….It follows that people with low self-control tend to have minimal tolerance for frustration and little ability to respond to conflict through verbal rather than physical means" (ibid). This relates to the application of escape theory to CS. If the major benefit of the deviant act is to provide relief from momentary irritation and avoid frustrating situations or conflict in general, then one method of coping with these difficult aspects of life is to turn to something familiar that provides a substantial amount of pleasure.

Strain theory is similar to conflict theory in that it argues that CS is a byproduct of the existing system. Developed by Merton (1949 [1957]), strain theory argues that American society has made economic success so important that it is both impossible and unacceptable for an individual to be happy with what he or she has. The impersonal nature of money makes the means by which one came into it – legitimate or fraudulent – an unimportant factor in a person's success, though still an important one in determining the nature of the person's character (ibid). Merton goes on to argue that there are five modes of adaptation: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Each mode represents the value the individual places on the cultural goal, in this case

economic success, and whether they accept or reject the institutionalized means of achieving the goal.

Considering this theoretical framework in conjunction to CS, the argument could be made that CS is an example of extreme conformity. Both the goals and the means are accepted by the shopper, which, by Merton's definition, classifies people with CS as conformists. The fact that their consumption is considered excessive by societal norms is what makes them extreme conformists.

Socio-Biological

Another possible explanation of CS involves the physiological sensations experienced by the shopper. Theories of biological sociology as proposed by Gove and Wilmoth (1990) and supported by Udry (1995) may be applied to CS. The argument developed here is that "risky and sometimes difficult or arduous" behavior is sometimes reinforced internally through a neurophysiologic high (Gove and Wilmoth, 1990). The application of this theory to property crimes is discussed, and may serve as a parallel to CS. The authors argue that most serious property crimes occur because of the external rewards they offer, and that it is hard to imagine property crimes occurring in the absence of these rewards (1990). However, these external rewards are not enough to explain the existence of crime, and so therefore there the neurophysiologic high that is associated with the performance of crime may be a part of the motivation to commit these behaviors.

Applied to CS, it is possible that the subject continues to act irrationally due to this endogenous reward system and in spite of his or her own acknowledgement that it is not a healthy behavior. The material reward may be a driving force behind the subject's

perceived need to continue shopping, but the internal, physical reward may be reinforcing the external reward, making the act of shopping that much more appealing.

The authors conclude with a discussion regarding the implications of their model, specifically arguing that if their model is correct, then finding healthier and more socially acceptable ways of providing oneself with the neurophysiologic high may be an adequate way of preventing future criminal acts (ibid). If true, this replacement strategy could work well for people with CS, not only in terms of finding a new source for their neurophysiologic high but helping them move beyond their compulsion and its external motivations as well.

Research Methods

Definition of Compulsive Shopping

For the purposes of this study, CS will be defined in terms of the definitions developed by McElroy (1994). People suffering from CS spend beyond their means, but this is not necessarily the only characteristic of CS. It is the uncontrollable urge to shop, which includes the act of going to different stores, bargain hunting, browsing, and so on. Regardless of how the shoppers act after they shop, be it returning the items they purchased, giving the items to charity, or trying to develop a more-disciplined budget, the fact remains that they did not need the items they purchased but could not stop themselves from doing so.

Though there are some distinctions in the literature between compulsive shopping and compulsive spending, it appears that these differentiations are in the minority. Benson (2000) says "most current researchers use the term *compulsive buying* and subscribe to an exceptionally specific definition proposed by McElroy and her colleagues" (2000: xxiv). However, this study will use the terms "compulsive shopper" and "compulsive buyer" interchangeably for two reasons. First, the literature does not adequately distinguish between the two, as the only apparent difference between compulsive shopping and compulsive buying is that compulsive buying incorporates anything that might be considered compulsive or reckless spending. Also, the subjects in the study refer to themselves as "shoppers," so in order to be consistent with their terminology, compulsive shopping and compulsive buying should be used interchangeably.

Data

Messages were collected from the message archives of an internet discussion group that can be found at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/shopping_addicts/. The group is both open and public. This type of information gathering was chosen because of the difficulty of recruiting people with CS for qualitative interviews; it is similar to the method used by Kern (2000) in his study of prostitution. By taking the message forum approach, the study is guaranteed subjects who are willing to discuss CS, whereas any attempt to recruit people for a large-scale study about a stigmatized topic could potentially result in low turn-out despite an expensive recruiting movement.

Altogether, 2,000 messages were collected, beginning with message number 5,000 and ending with message number 7,000. This covers the time period of September 23, 2003, to March 1, 2005. Message 5,000 was selected as the starting point because of the group's history: a disgruntled member had the group bombarded, or spammed, with daily and sometimes hourly reminders to go shop. Because the messages are numbered in chronological order, message 5,000 represents the point at which these automatic reminders died down, and group members started coming back to participate.

A sample of 2,000 non-random messages was chosen to leave the study with enough usable messages after all spam (primarily advertisements or automated announcements regarding any uploads to the group's file system) and duplicate messages were excluded from the analysis. The number of messages posted per month ranges from 24 in September 2003 to 297 in February 2005. The group goes through periods of steady increase in activity that may decrease in one month, but then increases to original levels the next.

Messages were selected from the group's archives in order to preserve the integrity of the research. Collecting every message in the group's history would open up the possibility of the research corrupting and influencing new messages posted to the group. Limiting the study to messages in the archive also helps to ensure that none of the participants will be influenced.

Messages were not selected at random in order to preserve the narrative of the group, which is why it was necessary to begin the collection process at the point in which the group discussion became relevant. A random sample would have potentially included a large percentage of the messages from the beginning of the group, all of which were designed to discourage discussion by encouraging the members to shop more.

All of the messages were collected and coded, and author-level data were collected by first grouping all of the messages by the screen name of their author and compiling a profile of the authors by collapsing those messages. For example, if an author mentions in one message that he lost his home because of debt and in another message he says that he is worried about being able to pay for his children to go to college, then that author's profile would reflect both codes.

It is also possible to view the profile of the members of the group, which could fill in any demographic variables not found in the data (i.e., age, race, and sex). By using both of these methods, a comprehensive author-level dataset will be compiled, and it will be possible to see how many people contributed to this 2,000-message time frame while being able to analyze the characteristics of these people.

For the purposes of this analysis, all identifying information has been removed. Members of this support group have been assigned pseudonyms that only identify their

gender; this was done in order to demonstrate that while CS primarily affects women, it is

not an entirely gender-specific phenomenon.

Control

   In order to control for the possibility that the collective attitude toward shopping may

not be unique to this particular discussion group, a second internet discussion group was

analyzed as well. A non-random sample of fifty messages was taken from the internet

discussion group found at http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/letstalkshop. The following

is the group's official description:

> For shoppers and fans of QVC and/or HSN. This group has been formed to talk
> about products, experiences and yes, gossip about show hosts, vendors, etc. (with
> reasonable respect requested). If you would like to make suggestions, air
> grievances, share your opinion or just make new friends, then please feel free to
> join. This group is NOT affiliated with QVC and/or HSN in any way. This group
> is NOT a place to sell things or advertise. So please refrain from doing so. If such
> a post is left then the member will be BANNED from this group. It is not for
> personal attacks on other members. Any personality issues must be handled via
> private email. It is a fun and informative place for those of us who spend our time
> and our money there, who let them into our homes, and who have something to
> say about it. We also discuss a multitude of other issues other than shopping.
> Some things to remember:
>
> We have a special PHOTOS section where members are welcome to post special
> photos or albums (such as from QVC shows or personal photos that you'd like to
> share with the group -- a new home, the holidays, a birth of a special baby human
> and/or petkid., etc.).
> Any distasteful photographs will be deleted and the member banned.
> If you click on DATABASE, you'll find two items of interest. First, a MEMBERS
> PROFILE PAGE which you can complete and share information about yourself
> with other members AND by popular demand, a RECIPES page which gives you
> the opportunity to share your favorite dishes with us.
>
> There's also our POLLS which I think you'll find interesting and we're always
> looking for new questions to add and under CALENDAR, you'll see upcoming
> events, etc. that you might be interested in. Then there's BOOKMARKS which
> will give you info on other sites that members have recommended.

> Please remember that the CHAT ROOM is open 24/7 so please be sure to pop in while you're here to see who's chatting.
>
> Hope you will join us!

The collection process began with message #74,802 and ended with message #74,852. Every message is from June 1, 2004. This month was chosen because the group's archives show it to be the most active in the history of the group. Though the control group was analyzed using the same coding categories as the subject group, new categories were also created to account for any variables that were found to be unique to this forum.

Once all of the messages in both the experiment and control groups were collected and coded, each group was collapsed to the author level for the final analysis. This involved creating a list of all of the authors who contributed to the messages collected, and compiling and reducing all of their messages into one case that indicates whether that person was ever coded as having mentioned one of the variables. In other words, if an author mentioned being lonely in 5 messages, therapy in 6 messages, and medication in 7 messages, their final entry into the dataset would indicate that they talked about being lonely, involved in therapy, and on medication. The number of times they posted in general or about specific topics was removed from the analysis. This was done to control for the authors who were the most active in the group. For example, one author posted extensively about his religious beliefs, and were these analyses conducted at the message-level, there would be a risk of religion having a more significant role in the final models because of the frequency of this author's posting.

Once the data were collapsed to the author level, two groups of people were eliminated from the study: first, any author who was posting to the group to understand the behavior of someone else in their life, such as a man posting about his wife's CS. This was done because a complete profile of the actual shopper could not be constructed, as the author would only be able to write about his or her own perceptions of the shopper's behavior. The second group eliminated from the study included those who were not compulsive shoppers. Included in this group were the authors who were posting to harass the other members and people posting to request information on the subject without explicitly stating that they were or believed they were a compulsive shopper. After these two groups were eliminated, the final dataset contained 197 authors.

Analyses

Content analysis was performed on the messages after they were collected. Babbie (2001) defines content analysis as the study of recorded communications. Accordingly, content analysis requires a thorough examination of what is being communicated, while the analysis of the data addresses why and how (2001). This is the exact approach that is being taken in the current study; collected data will be analyzed through several iterations of coding (a tentative list of categories has been attached: see Appendix B).

Rather than approaching this with a number of specific research hypotheses in mind, the Grounded Theory Method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was utilized. Grounded Theory Method, or GTM, allows the researcher to study a given concept without any specific questions in mind and allows the data to reveal itself to him. In other words, the researcher looks for patterns in the data to analyze rather than using it to answer specific questions or trying to apply a given theory to it. GTM gives the researcher a great deal

more freedom to work with, as CS is a largely unexplained area, even within psychiatry, and is relatively undocumented from a sociological or criminological perspective.

The messages that were collected were not selected using a random sample. Consecutive messages were chosen to retain the narrative nature of the discussion. This linear approach is key to the nature of this particular subject, as it could yield a number of ways in which compulsive shoppers who reach out for help grow after finding the group.

Because this study is using the Grounded Theory approach, descriptive, bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted based on the patterns that seemed to exist in the data. While there were a number of expectations regarding what these data would yield because of the findings of previous researchers, it was impossible to say with any confidence what, exactly, would be there. Because of the dichotomous nature of many of the coding categories, the data has been primarily analyzed using logistic regression.

Benefits of This Research Design

The benefits of this type of research are numerous. One, it is unobtrusive. Because messages were collected from a public, open forum, there was no chance of the researcher influencing anyone posting to the forum. The act of studying this group would have led the subjects or attempted to guide them toward what is hypothesized to be important about CS, or influenced them in a way to affect the data to predetermine the shape of the data and the results of the analysis.

Furthermore, since the period of messages that were collected had ended, there was no chance of any recent messages being collected – which means that there was no possibility for the respondents to be influenced in any way by the research. In conjunction with that, it is also important to note that the data were collected from their

natural setting and therefore not loaded with preformed expectations. Were these interviews conducted in a clinical setting, the respondents might be tempted to twist their stories to fit the expectations of the researcher or to hide the shame they may be experiencing due to CS so as to not compound it by perceiving to embarrass themselves in front of the researcher by admitting to something that is not taken seriously by the general public (ibid).

Another benefit of this type of research method is that, due to the specifically defined coding categories and the availability of the data, this research can be replicated by anyone wanting to confirm or disprove its findings. These coding categories allow the researcher to run numerous coding waves, examining and re-examining the data at length. This also speaks to the reliability of the data. The data can always be coded and recoded, making certain that the coding is consistent (Babbie, 2001).

Limitations

As with any research, this study comes with a number of limitations and shortcomings. First, data could not be solicited: the researcher could not contact anyone involved with the discussion forum in any way. Because of this, any peculiarities in the data could not be researched beyond what was collected, nor could any specific questions about the nature of compulsive spending be addressed. The stream of conversation could not be steered from the topics that were truly important to the members of the group. All that could be discussed and/or interpreted was what they said. The absence of data on a particular topic is meaningless.

Second, the members of the group may not be representative of compulsive shoppers. Because this is an internet discussion forum and not a public, real-world support group,

this forum is limited to those with CS who still have the means of getting computer access and the background and capability to navigate the internet. In spite of the rise in popularity of the internet over the past ten years, as well as its increasing availability through public libraries and internet cafes, this discrepancy should still be considered a serious concern.

Also, the data period may not be reflective of typical group interactions. Though the messages collected represent a substantial percentage of its archive, there no guarantee that the content and group dynamics did not change in the time following the data period. In other words, while it may appear that during the data period, the members of the discussion forum may as a group have one opinion on what CS is and how it affects their life, after the data period, they may have developed ideas about CS that are contradictory to what they have already discussed.

It is also necessary to point out that the assumption that the frequency of topic discussion is representative of topic importance may not be true. Though there may be numerous messages where the forum members talk about any number of unrelated subjects, this does not necessarily mean that CS is not an important subject, either to the members themselves or to this particular study.

Findings

Who Are They?

Of the subjects in this study whose gender could be identified, virtually all were female. This supports the research of Black (2001), who argued that compulsive shopping primarily affects women. Outside of this, they possessed a variety of demographic characteristics, eliminating the possibility that CS was an addiction that affected only a specific group of people. Employment status, educational experience, and relationship status did not influence whether people develop CS, according to these data. Also, the presence of children in their lives did not encourage CS, but rather influenced the way the addiction took form in their lives. Finally, no similarities were found among the men in this study, beyond their gender.

Furthermore, concurrent or prior addictions did not appear to influence CS in anyway. There were subjects in this study who had a history of overeating or alcoholism, and there were those who did not. No predominant background behavior was found, which is contrary to the findings of a number of studies, including Lejoyeux et al. (1997), Black et al (1998), and LaRose and Eastin (2002), who found that people with a compulsive shopping problem were also likely to suffer from depression. To this end, a person from any socioeconomic background is a candidate for developing CS.

What Do They Do?

Contrary to the stereotypical image of a compulsive shopper as being a vapid and materialistic woman who returns home everyday from several hours at the mall, arms full of brightly colored shopping bags, the truth of the matter is that CS can be done in a variety of ways. The advent of new technology allows some compulsive shoppers to

spend hours on the internet or in front of the television, waiting for the next great deal to come along. Others enjoy studying the multitude of catalogues delivered to their homes everyday, daydreaming about what they might buy next. Still others rush from store to store, scanning the clearance racks for great buys, oftentimes scouring the entire store aisle by aisle to make sure they didn't miss anything.

All of these purchases are paid for in cash, through a checking account, or using a credit card. While many compulsive shoppers did have credit card debt, not all of them were crippled by it. Furthermore, while the stereotypical compulsive shopper may not be bothered or even aware of the financial impact their shopping has on their lives, many of the compulsive shoppers examined in this study were well aware of the negative impact their shopping was having on their financial well-being. Those who managed their family's finances would tirelessly manipulate their accounts, juggling bills and letting recent accounts lapse so as to pay the more overdue bills in order to compensate for their behavior. Others were aware that they were putting themselves in financial danger, but shopped anyway.

Why Do They Do It?

There are a multitude of reasons why a person might turn to compulsive shopping. There were those who did it because they needed an escape. They were unhappy with the circumstances of their daily lives and turned to CS as a way of forgetting about their problems and escaping into this dream as a means of avoiding whatever problems they did not want to cope with or simply felt they could not handle. Consequently, their unwillingness and inability to manage the details of their lives caused their situation to become more difficult; their need to escape becomes greater and, in turn, resulted in more

shopping. This is identical to the escape theory formulated by Faber and Vohs (2002), which postulates that CS is the result of an internalized need to avoid, or escape, the stressors of their everyday lives. Kelly provides an example of this when she writes, "It helps me to escape my problems and forget about everything around me. Sometimes I'd rather go shopping than to pay a bill or take care of things that are important to me." This sentiment is repeated when Karen writes, "Because we can just forget – for that time in the store – all our problems. It's crazy, but it's true. It's a total escape. Unfortunately, one that we pay for later."

A second prominent motivation for CS was the need for social attention. These were the subjects who were desperate for adult contact and interaction. This desperation stemmed from their perceived belief that they did not have any friends, or it was due to their spending a great deal of time with their children every day, without enough adult contact. These shoppers turned to CS because of the amount of positive attention given to them by sales clerks, however two-dimensional that attention may have been. There were several instances where people who were motivated to shop for attention knew the clerks at their favorite stores on a first-name basis, and more often than not these clerks had their debit or credit card information on file to make it easier for the shoppers to spend. For example, Emily states that, "So often I go to the store because I feel lonely. I want to be around other people. I want to feel like I actually have a life."

A common side effect of shopping for attention was the idea that buying a lot of stuff would get the subjects more friends. While many times the subjects acknowledged that this had not actually won them any friends as of yet, they still continued the behavior in the hope that it would make them popular. For example, Becky writes, "I have no excuse

for what I've done. What I think it comes down to, is that I'm fat and I feel the need to validate myself. It's like, if I have cool stuff, people will ignore that I'm fat." This concept is repeated when Michael writes, "I even know why I do it-cos I have no friends, cos I feel unworthy of people's friendship and buying stuff makes me feel good about myself (for a while)and makes me feel people will like me if I have nice things. But I still have no friends and all I have is a debt that's so big i'm ashamed to admit the amount."

A common motivation linked to the previously mentioned motivations was shopping due to depression. These shoppers were depressed about something in their lives and turned to shopping for a temporary high that allowed them to forget their problems for a short time. Pete writes, "I have been struggling with depression for most of my life and when I'm depressed I spend."

However, if they did not take the necessary steps to combat the depression, it often led to a cycle wherein the financial difficulties that arose from CS depressed the subjects further, which led them to shop more. This idea is illustrated when Josie says, "I spend because I am depressed then I get more depressed and spend more, it's a terrible cycle."

Low self-esteem was another motivating factor that led some of the subjects to CS. Rosie writes, "I've had low self-esteem my whole life and assume that is part of my spending problem. I need new things to feel worthy." This concept is reiterated when Jan states that, "For me, it's about armor. If I'm richly and/or stylishly dressed, I feel less vulnerable. I feel that others will see me as someone who knows who she is and is classy, elegant, untouchable." Here we see a similarity to shopping due to loneliness: shopping and the acquisition of a large amount of material goods could, in the mind of the shoppers, make them popular and make them feel better about themselves. All of these

motivations support the definition of CS formulated by Boundy (2000), who argued that the stimulation and distraction of shopping allowed the subject to avoid unwanted feelings. This definition also supports Faber and Vohs escape theory (2002).

How Do They Maintain Their Behavior?

The most common way that the subjects in this study were able to continue their behavior and maintain these cycles of continued shopping was by concealing it from those around them. A variety of concealment techniques were discussed by the subjects, including hiding purchases, hiding bills, and outright lying to their spouses or family members about the extent of their shopping.

Hiding purchases was the most common way of maintaining this behavior among this group. Shoppers who would go out to different stores to shop would hide their purchases outside of their home first (for example, several subjects would keep things hidden in the trunks of their cars, while another kept things at her office). When the opportune time to bring them into their homes presented itself, these items would be mixed in with other things, or hidden in basements or garages and not brought out until some time later. This particular hiding behavior many times led to the subjects either purchasing duplicate items, having forgotten the original purchase, or stumbling onto things they had bought months or years earlier, hidden, and then forgotten about.

Lying to their spouses and/or family members about the extent of their shopping was a concealment technique that often accompanied hiding purchases. In these cases, the subjects either told their spouses that they did not shop at all that day or week, or dramatically underreported their amount of shopping. Hiding purchases helped make the lie more believable, and hiding credit card bills and bank statements from their spouses

decreased the chances that the truth would be discovered. Unfortunately for many shoppers, the increased availability of account information on the internet made it more difficult to lie about their shopping.

There was a surprisingly high amount of cases where the subjects said that their shopping was concealed by the ignorance of their spouses. There were many cases where the stresses of their spouses' own lives, typically work-related, blinded them from the amount of shopping their significant others were doing. This ignorance was oftentimes perpetuated by the shoppers not only buying things for themselves, but also buying new clothes for their husbands and children. This gift-giving behavior helped to mask the amount of shopping that was being done.

In several cases, the revelation that their spouses had a shopping addiction resulted in the shoppers having their credit or debit cards taken away and being put on strict allowances. However, the ability of the shoppers to easily find out their credit card numbers, either through the internet or by simply finding their last credit card statements, allowed them to continue shopping in spite of their spouses' wishes. For example, Laura discusses her husband's attempt to limit her shopping when she says:

> "My husband had to open a seperate [sic] checking account so I wouldn't spend money needed for bills, but I know how to spend little amounts here and there out of his account that he never finds out about. Example: He gives me his card to take to the grocery store. Sometimes i'll just buy a pack of gum and get $20 cash back so I can use it on things that he doesn't know about. Then he doesn't question the amount spent at the store. When he gets a large comission [sic] at work i've withdrawen [sic] money out of his account and know that he will never be able to tell because he doesn't check his account balance when he knows there's enough in there to cover everything and more."

Here, we see a perfect example of a shopper who has found ways to get around the restrictions placed on her by her husband. A similar story is told when Suzanne writes:

"I buy things just because and the worse of it is, its runing [sic] my new marriage, my husband has been trying to help me by taking my credit card away but when he is in the shower I go in this wallet or where ever it may be and get it then go shopping the next day just because I have to, then get away with it until he checks the checking/account statements and wants to know where all the money has gone to."

Again, using direct financial controls as a way to stop or limit the amount of shopping the subjects can afford does not work if the subjects themselves do not want to stop shopping. Other subjects experienced a more extreme form of control. Sarah discusses her husband's approach to her compulsive shopping:

"My turning point with my husband was the threat of divorce. I don't know if he would actually do it, but he was so mad when he said it, I believed him. I cannot have a credit card under the threat of divorce. I hate that control over me but it has been a positive thing so far. He did bail me out twice too, and my way hasn't worked yet, so I am committed to this."

This willingness on the part of their spouses to impose forms of direct control on the subjects, in hopes that the problem will fix itself, instead of helping them understand their addiction and work with them to defeat it, speaks to one of the barriers that compulsive shoppers face in trying to recover.

Many of the concealment techniques discussed above fit several versions of the definition compulsive shopping, including the working definition of this study. McElroy et al. (1994) describe the effects of CS thusly: "the buying preoccupations, impulses, or behaviors cause marked distress, are time consuming, significantly interfere with social or occupational functioning, or result in financial problems" (1994: xxv), while Boundy (2000) describes CS as a cycle of behavior that constantly perpetuates itself. When these definitions are integrated, we see a substantial amount of support for this idea of CS as a self-fulfilling prophecy: the subject engages in the behavior, feels guilty for doing so,

attempts to conceal her behavior by hiding their purchases or the evidence of their

purchases, and then when the guilt of shopping and the shame of concealment becomes

too overwhelming, they shop again and continue this downward spiral. This is also

similar to the theories of conspicuous consumption established by Veblen (1899) and

Packard (1959), in that some of these behaviors – such as shopping under the assumption

that it will make the subject more popular – could be construed as shopping as an attempt

to create the illusion of belonging to a higher status group. Packard writes that all of us

surround ourselves "wittingly or unwittingly, with status symbols we hope will influence

the raters appraising us" (1959: 7). If this is true, then it makes this picture of compulsive

shopping much more complex when taken in conjunction with the other theories included

in this discussion. The desire of a shopper to create the image of belonging to a higher

status group, and the feelings that result from their inability to do so, may increase the

subject's desire to escape from these unwanted feelings, thus adding another dimension

to the complexity of this behavior. The inclusion of escape theory in explanations of CS

also begs for the inclusion of conflict theory as well, as their relation to CS is very

similar: the reification of the current system forces its subjects to attempt to alleviate the

suffering they experience as a result of the system by indulging themselves in it, rather

than attempting to create any sort of change (Wolff, 2005). This indulgence can be

construed as an escape from the unwanted feelings they are experiencing.

Another factor that can arise from long-term compulsive shopping is the storage of all

of the goods that are purchased. Logistically speaking, a person's shopping is limited by

the size of his or her home, and oftentimes CS results in an overwhelming amount of

clutter. Walter relates his experience dealing with people in a 12-step program designed

for people with cluttering problems:

> "One lady in CLA had a family of 5 trying to live in a small trailer and complained of being cramped. Another lady had a small apartment with a kitchen counter top of 2 square feet and one kitchen cabinet. Clutter complaints? What else could they expect with such small living spaces. It is possible to live uncluttered in such spaces, but it is very hard and we should not beat ourselves for living in such hard circumstances if we are cluttered somewhat."

A similar story regarding clutter and the amount of space it takes up is told when Phyllis

writes, "…things I don't use, don't like, or that don't help this apartment (we have 3 really

small rooms – not much space for clutter!) is going to have to go." That being said, it

was important for the shoppers to be able to find ways to fit new items into their homes.

This clutter was typically managed in three ways: returning it, donating it, or just

disposing of it. In terms of the criminological theories discussed, the management of

clutter can be linked to Becker's labeling theory (1963[1991]). In one sense, managing

this clutter in a positive way can be viewed as the subject attempting to shed her deviant

label by acting in a responsible, non-deviant way. In another sense, by decreasing the

amount of material goods in their possession, the subject is attempting to remove the

image of belonging to the upper class. Regardless of their motivation, the end result of

responsibly managing their deviancy is a reduction of the strength and appropriateness of

the deviant label.

How Do They Stop?

The subjects in this study explored a number of options to stop, or at least get

control of, their compulsive shopping. If the General Theory of Crime postulated by

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) is considered a valid explanation of CS, then many of the

behaviors exhibited by people successfully stopping their shopping should be seen as a successful improvement in self-control.

The support group itself was a tremendous help to many of the subjects, as it allowed them the opportunity to discuss with other compulsive shoppers why they had this problem and the ways in which they could replace it with something healthier and more productive. This idea of developing replacement activities became of the group's key ways to regain control over their lives, and there were several authors who found their lives taking a turn for the better when they began exercising more, exploring their artistic abilities, or spent more time with their loved ones. This replacement of negative behaviors with more positive ones is an example of the application of the GTC, in that the subjects were actively improving their self-control by denying themselves whatever stimulation they derived from shopping, and focusing their energy elsewhere. This is not substituting one addiction with another, as the pleasures derived from some of replacement activities – such as spending more time with their families – were not addictive so much as they were spiritually fulfilling for the subject. The peace offered by these replacement activities gave the subject the feeling of having more control over her life. Furthermore, when the GTC is taken in conjunction with the socio-biological theories (Gove and Wilmoth, 1990; Udry, 1995), the argument can be made that the physical and mental health benefits that result from replacing shopping with regular exercise, for example, improved the subjects' self-esteem and combated their depression, which decreased their desires to escape from their daily stresses and thereby increased their self-control.

Developing replacement activities also oftentimes coincided with the group encouraging its members to be as open and honest with their family and friends about their shopping as possible. This exposure, and the shaming that goes with it, often led to the shoppers receiving the psychological support from their loved ones, who were more open to helping the subjects because of their honesty and were not put in a position of finding out about this problem on their own. Lindsay writes, "I just confessed to my husband yesterday how far we were in debt. He had no idea how far, but knew it was becoming a problem. I was shopping continiuosly [sic]. He hugged me during all my babling [sic] and crying and said we'd work through it." A similar story is told when Catherine writes, "I can now decide what *feels* right to me, what I want out of my life now. At 43, it's almost a do over. My husband is very supportive. He knows that I have a lot of self-exploration to do." Continuing to conceal this behavior and attempting to manage it by themselves can have extreme consequences, as Lucille explains: "I even sometimes consider suicide so I won't have to confront my husband with my awful problem. I know that isn't the answer and I would never do that as I don't want to leave my 3 kids without a mother. But sometimes I just feel so bogged down by the debt, the secrets, etc. that death sometimes seems like the only and easiest way out." All of these messages are representative of the degree to which some of the subjects in this group have experienced positive responses from their spouses regarding their compulsive shopping, and the effects that support or lack thereof can have on their psyches.

In addition to being open about their compulsion and developing more constructive behaviors to replace it, many of the subjects in this group also turned to private therapy and 12-step programs such as Debtors Anonymous in order to get their lives under

control. As helpful as the support group was, many members found that it worked better if they used the group as a supplement to their 12-step work or meetings with a therapist. Ultimately, this gave them the opportunity to discuss their problems and explore their motivations with people trained to help them, and, in doing so, it solidified in their own mind that they had a problem. The presence and pressure of these external forces, as well as the internal acceptance of the problem, can also help improve the amount of self-control in the subject as per the GTC.

In regard to her experience with therapy and the support group simultaneously, Margaret writes that, "I am seeing a therapist and it is helping, but I think the group helps immensely too. Just having people listen that care and truly understand is such a big help. I enjoy it that people are not judgmental and truly encourage you and inspire you." Here we see an author affirming the positive effects that working with the internet support group in conjunction with other sources had on her life. The idea of being open with those close to the subjects as well as seeking outside help is also discussed, as it is in this passage by Walter:

> "I had to restructure my life with 12 step work as well as make my new life transparent to my family instead of hiding things from them. Part of my program is to discuss all potential purchases with them...out in the open. The first step is to get all our past mistakes out in the open and then work on repairing the wreckage. Of course, we each have different families, so you alone can evaluate what the ramifications of 'getting it all out' will have."

Unfortunately, there were a number of barriers that prevented many shoppers from successfully controlling their behavior. First and foremost, compulsive shopping is not recognized as a real problem by many people. Compulsive shoppers can encounter this bias either at home, where their friends and family may advise them to "just stop

shopping," or in private therapy, where the therapists may offer the same advice. This can often result in the shoppers themselves believing that they don't have a problem, and returning to their old destructive behavior. Julie discusses this misconception: "My husband does not understand, but is willing to work past it, He thinks it's in my head and not a <real> addiction. He is willing to forgive me and try to have a future. I don't know how much a future we will have if he won't understand my addiction and try to help me with it. I tried to get him to go to counseling but he would not go."

This prejudice was not limited to interaction in the home. Becky writes to the group regarding her experience with seeking help outside of her social group: "I've gone to a couple of DA meetings, but I just don't feel comfortable there. Everyone else seemed to be in so many other 12-step programs. And, they seemed to be so down about their situations that it just made me feel worse. I went to a counselor for awhile, but she didn't think it was an addiction." The idea that compulsive shopping is not a real addiction is a barrier that someone suffering from CS is likely to encounter at some point during his or her recovery.

In addition to the lack of understanding about the nature of compulsive shopping, CS is different from other addictions. Where an alcoholic can avoid going to the bar and a gambling addict can avoid going to the casino, a shopping addict cannot avoid shopping. This concept was brought up multiple times in the group, often in response to advertisers who mistook them for a pro-shopping website. For example, Tina responds to an advertiser on the site by saying: "This website is for people with a legitimate problem, shopping addiction, just like alcoholics and gambling, drug addiction, etc. Would you tell a [sic] alcoholic to work at a bar, a gambler to work in a casino, or a drug addict to

work in a pharmacy? Get the hell out of here and go prey on someone else

LOSER!!!!!!!!!!!" The advertisers on the group were subject to future attacks that

addressed the similarities between CS and other addictions: Trisha writes: "I don't

appreciate you sending advertisments for shopping to a shopping addicts group. This is a

serious addication and shouldn't be taken lightly. I am sorry for you that you don't

understand the depth of our afflication and that it is a source for your exploitation and

amusment. Put it this way, would send an advertisment for a new bar opening to an AA

group website? Your kind probably would." In spite of this, there was no backlash from

any of the subjects in this group against the concepts of consumerism, capitalism, or its

proponents. All of the subjects in this group seemed to accept consumerism as a fact of

life and did not approach their CS as being a result of the system, but instead as a result

of their own personal weaknesses.

Ultimately, this prevailing belief throughout many parts of society that CS is not a real

problem weakened the desire of the subject to improve her own self-control. This lack of

supportive external forces gave the subjects little recourse in improving their own

behavior, and the frustration that resulted often caused them to return to their negative

behaviors. Feeling that they had a problem and being denied help forced them to

continue to internalize their feelings and caused the problem to perpetuate itself. Without

people in their lives understanding the exact nature of their problem and recognizing their

own role in the recovery of the shopper, it made it difficult for the shopper to change their

identity and that much more tempting to indulge themselves in their compulsion. This

explanation draws upon aspects of the GTC (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), escape

theory (Faber and Vohs, 2002), conflict theory (Wolff, 2005), and labeling theory (Becker, 1963[1991]).

Even something as innocent as grocery shopping can be a dangerous activity for some compulsive shoppers, because it gives them the opportunity to walk through the store daydreaming about all of the healthy or exquisite meals they are going to make. Also, many grocery stores also carry books and movies, further allowing them the opportunity to fall back into their old behaviors. This regular temptation faced by many, if not all, compulsive shoppers makes it that much more important for the subjects to have a strong internal sense of self-control. This issue came up in the group in a number of ways. An example of this can be found when Maria writes that: "I mean I will eventually have to go to a grocery store or somewhere to buy something and I just feel like its [sic] gotta be all or nothing. I don't know how to stop successfully." The preceding examples reinforce not only the importance of self-control in regard to the recovery of the shopper, but also the interaction between self-control, escape, and indulgence, and the acceptance of the deviant identity.

Is It An Addiction?

Shafer (2005) observes that there is no universally accepted clinical definition of addiction. Tcheremissine (2004) states that there are two distinct characteristics of drug addiction: uncontrollable use and withdrawal symptoms when use of the drug is stopped. Mendola (2006) argues that the existing physical and moral definitions of addiction do not mesh well with each other, and proposes a new definition of addiction, called the existential model of addiction, that defines it as a compulsive or uncontrollable behavior

that the addict does not endorse the behavior(s) that result from the addict's everyday stresses and anxiety.

For the purposes of this study, Mendola's model of existential addiction will be used to determine whether compulsive shopping is truly an addiction. In order to do this, the level of discussion regarding self-control should be examined, as well as the frequency and types of motivation, specifically stress, anxiety, and escapism.

Beginning with self-control, 27% of the subjects discussed their lack of self-control in regard to their CS. Examples of this discussion include a message from Sherry saying that "I already owe about $400 for the next month. It makes me feel sad at times that I have no self control, but hopefully this group will help me out. If anyone has any words of encouragement please help!!!!" Here, we see the author exhibiting what could be called borderline depression because of her CS, which indicates that this is not a behavior she is proud of having. This sentiment is reiterated when Mae states that: "Sometimes I cannot help it, I get so stressed or down sometimes, and all around me are strip malls or the internet and an open outlet for me to look at clothes, shoes, or purses... Why do I feel this need to shop for stuff? I think its [sic] because it makes me feel better, like these items will help me to look better. It's really annoying and I need some pointers on how to stop..." Just like the previous quote, here we see an author who was upset about her amount of uncontrolled shopping. This theme is repeated again in a message from Victoria, who says that, "Even as I write this, I realize that I need to start taking down my debt so that SOMEDAY I will have something of my own. I feel like sh-t because I have absolutely no control. I have an absolutely [sic] need for instant gratification with shopping, food, you name it. I need help – I need to find a live self-help group but am not

sure where to find such a group. Can someone out there help?" Again, the author

expressed her desire to gain control of her shopping, and the negative emotions she had

due to this lack of control.

Torrie vented to the group about this lack of control, writing that "I see something and

I think I HAVE to have it. There is no way around it. I have no control over it. And then

not only do I buy that one thing I have to have I then turn around and buy other things

like it." This quote is an excellent example of the degree to which CS can affect a person

– it is not necessarily the uncontrollable urge to just buy one item, but it can have a

snowball effect and result in the person shopping for hours and buying far more than he

or she planned. It is an example of binge-shopping.

This sentiment is often repeated. Stacie says, "I know that it isn't too serious right

now, as I don't have a credit card, but I feel so helpless and out of control about money.

All I think about is all the things I want. I sit in a constant knot of anxiety and panic

because I'm not sure how I'm going to afford this item. I contemplate prostitution,

anything, to get money to shop." This statement is an excellent example of a person

having no control over her behavior, considering that the author claims to have

considered prostitution in order to satisfy her CS. This is reiterated when Mary says, after

relating to the group how many bills she has to pay, "Yet, guess what I did yesterday? I

went shopping. I feel like hell ~ and I, too, am on an anti-anxiety medication (Sarafem).

I've always been a huge fan of shopping, but I feel like

I'm getting more and more out of control." This author's story is representative of a

shopper who is shopping because of the conditions of her personal life.

The above examples illustrate the lack of self-control and the degree to which the subjects in this group regret their behavior and yet still feel like they are powerless over it. The topic of their motivations and the relation to the definition of existential addiction will be discussed later in the study.

Background Information

The authors in this dataset were predominantly female, with the gender of 77.6% of the authors being determined. The average age of the subjects was approximately 31 years old, however, the age of only 37.5% of the authors could be determined.

Table 1:

Background Characteristics	N	Mean
Have Children	197	28%
Have A Partner	116	90%
Have Been Bailed Out Financially	197	17%
Went to College	197	15%
Have A Job	197	26%
Taking Medication	197	9%
Have No Self-Control	197	27%
Overeat	197	12%
Victim of Any Form of Abuse	197	3%
Came From A Poor Family	197	5%
Have Previous CS Experience	197	15%
General Anxiety	197	7%
Learned Behavior	197	4%
Religious	197	6%
Other Addictions	197	8%

A number of other background characteristics were discussed by the authors beyond the aforementioned demographic variables. For example, 17% of the group had been financially bailed out after earlier shopping binges, but had returned to their old ways. Twelve percent of the group explicitly stated that they had a problem with overeating, while eight percent of the group mentioned having some other addiction. Twenty-six percent of the group mentioned being employed in some degree, and these jobs ranged

from the stereotypical 9-to-5 office work, to running a booth at a flea market, to making wedding dresses. Only 15% of the group mentioned ever having been in college, while 5% said that they had come from a poor family. Finally, 3% of the group discussed suffering either sexual abuse as a child or physical and emotional abuse as an adult.

Background Characteristics

The first step in the analysis was to determine if there were different backgrounds that compulsive shoppers came from. Sixteen background variables were identified (see Table 1 above). Of these variables, "Age" was removed from the analysis because of the number of missing cases, and "Gender" was removed because the authors in the data appeared to be predominantly female. Conversely, the variables "Victim of Any Form of Abuse" and "Learned Behavior" were removed because less than 5% of the authors in the data mentioned either. This left the analysis with 12 background variables.

The remaining background variables were then subjected to a factor analysis in order to determine if there was a way in which these variables could be grouped. Using varimax rotation, 5 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. These factors, listed in Table 2, have been labeled with the most appropriate names possible, based on the way in which the variables in the analyses were grouped (see Table 3).

Table 2:
Background Factor Analysis
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
CS Experience	2.152	17.933	17.933
Mental Health	1.346	11.218	29.151
Addictive Personality	1.272	10.6	39.752
Traditional/Conservative	1.167	9.726	49.478
Educated	1.073	8.939	58.417

Table 3, below, shows how each variable in the analysis loaded on each of the 5 significant factors.

Table 3: Background Factor Analysis: Results

	Component CS Experience	Mental Health	Addictive Personality	Traditional Conservative	Educated
Have Children	0.05	0.15	-0.08	0.84	-0.03
Have Been Bailed Out Financially	0.64	0.12	-0.04	0.08	0.3
Went To College	0.26	0.07	0.1	-0.08	0.74
Have A Job	0.64	-0.22	0.19	-0.06	-0.05
Taking Medication	0.1	0.78	0.05	0.22	-0.08
Have No Self-Control	0.4	0.31	-0.15	0.15	-0.18
Overeat	0.3	0.25	0.61	0.24	-0.06
Came From A Poor Family	0.23	0.04	0.29	-0.13	-0.61
Have Previous CS Experience	0.67	0.15	-0.01	0.01	-0.01
General Anxiety	0.02	0.76	0.22	-0.15	0.19
Religious	-0.02	-0.33	0.48	0.53	0.27
Have Other Addictions	-0.12	0.09	0.75	-0.17	-0.08

As can be seen in Table 3, there does not appear to be an obvious pattern regarding which background variables loaded on which factors. For example, the variables "Have Been Bailed Out Financially," "Have A Job," "Have Previous CS Experience," and "No Self Control" all loaded the highest on factor #1, but there are no apparent similarities between these four variables. Another example is factor #4, where the only variables to load highly are "Have Children" and "Religious."

Unfortunately, because of the ways in which the variables in this portion of the analysis loaded onto the five significant factors, it was decided that the best approach would be to determine if any significant motivations existed in the data and then compare the background characteristics against those motivations.

Motivations

Eleven motivational variables were identified in the data: "Want To Escape," "Feel Alone," "Low Self-Esteem," "Shop For Revenge," "Shop For A High," "Shop To Fill Void," "Shop Due To Anxiety," "Shop Due To Stress," "Obsession," "Shop For Control," and "Depression." "Want To Escape" indicates whether the subjects discussed shopping as a way to escape from their day-to-day life. For example, Kelly writes that "It helps me to escape my problems and forget about everything around me. Sometimes I'd rather go shopping than to pay a bill or take care of things that are important to me."

The variable "Feel Alone" represents whether the subjects talked about shopping as a way to combat their own loneliness. For example, Margaret says, "For me it's been about loneliness, which I almost hate to admit. I also miss my family that are on the west coast. There are probably many reasons I shop but I know at the time it makes me feel better."

The "Low Self-Esteem" variable was designed to represent whether the subjects discussed shopping due to their low self-esteem, just as Kristy does when she writes, "I think for me, a lot of it was a self-esteem issue – they wouldn't love me unless I gave them things, they couldn't possibly love me for myself alone."

The "Shop For Revenge" variable was created for those instances when the subjects said that they shop as a way to get revenge on someone close to them. Lisa writes, "My boyfriend to upset me, and i am out shopping, spending at least 100 dollars, when i started college a year and a half ago i had 10,000 dollars in my savings account, and now i have a little over 400." Another example of this can be found when Pam writes, "I have

an argument with my husband, and because I'm angry with him I go on a spending binge – when really I'm hurting both of us and our financial security."

The variable "Shop For A High" was created to represent the instances where the subjects discussed shopping for a high. Miriam illustrates this when she writes, "I love the thrill of going into a store and buying a new outfit. I love thinking about it during the day. Actually anything from nailpolish to a magazine is a bit of a rush."

The variable "Shop To Fill Void" is designed to represent those cases where the subjects discussed shopping in order to fill a void in their life. This could stem from the end of a relationship, children moving out, or just mentioning an ambiguous hole they feel inside of them. For example, Carrie writes, "I don't think I have ever heard anything explain my feelings about shopping better. You are right. It is having a little hole that needs filling. The only problem is when I fill one hole another one pops up." This sentiment is repeated when Stacie writes, "You don't have to apologize for the life you have, your parents or upbringing. I DO have sympathy for you. It is very hard when we can't stop buying things and it is to fill the void inside."

The "Shop Due To Anxiety" variable was designed to measure those cases where the subjects explicitly said that they shopped when they felt anxious. This is different from the general anxiety variable, which indicates whether the subjects say that they have struggled with or currently are struggling with anxiety, but do not say that this anxiety results in their shopping. For example, Ivy says that "I wish it were that simple. We are intelligent thinking beings. I can go weeks without buying anything other than groceries and gas for the car. Then I get anxious, or depressed and go shopping for my retail therapy."

The "Shop Due To Stress" variable indicates whether the subjects discussed shopping because they were under stress. This stress can come from any area, including work, school, or life at home. Oftentimes, this was linked with shopping as an escape. For example, Andrea writes, "I am hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt because of the many, many times that I went shopping in order to 'get my mind off things,' or 'relieve stress,' yet now all that debt is causing me even more stress and problems." This idea of shopping to relieve stress is again repeated when Amanda says, "I find that I cannot go into a store without making major purchases, so I try to avoid going to stores especially if I'm stressed, depressed, etc. If I'm in an emotional situation all I want to do is shop."

The variable "Obsession" was designed to represent whether the subjects said that they shopped because they were obsessed with some item. An example of this can be found when Marilyn writes:

> "Once I start to buy, I want to continue to do so even though I don't need or really even want the item or items. Example, I am a nurse, I have to wear uniforms, I must have close to 50 if not more nursing tops. It started out as fun, to have cute tops, now it is an obsession. Even when I know I don't need one, I will go out and get not one, but several/many tops or pants"

The variable "Depression" was designed to represent those cases where the subjects said that they shopped because they were depressed. For example, Pete writes: "I have been struggling with depression for most of my life and when I'm depressed I spend." This statement is indicative of all of the depressed shoppers.

A standard rate of occurrence of 5% or greater was established for this portion of the analysis in order for more accurate factors to be developed. This resulted in two variables being removed from the analysis: "Shop Due To Anxiety" and "Shop For Control."

Table 4:
Descriptive Statistics -- Motivational Factors

	N	Frequency
Escape	197	16%
Alone	197	8%
Low Self Esteem	197	20%
Revenge	197	6%
High	197	19%
Void	197	8%
Anxiety	197	4%
Stress	197	7%
Obsession	197	10%
Want Control	197	3%
Depression	197	25%

Using the remaining nine variables, bivariate correlations were developed in order to determine any existing relationships and to look for any possibility of colinearity. While statistically significant relationships were found, none of the coefficients were high enough to give any cause for concern.

Table 5: Bivariate Correlations -- Motivations

	Escape	Alone	LSE	Rev	High	Void	Stress	Obs	Dep
Want Escape	1 *								
Feel Alone	0.322 *	1							
Low Self Esteem	0.161 *	0.412 *	1						
Want Revenge	0.133	0.177 *	0.157 *	1					
Get High	0.168 *	0.184 *	0.306 *	0.049	1				
Fill Void	0.133	0.335 *	0.29 *	0.18 *	0.15 *	1			
Relieve Stress	0.36 *	0.135 *	0.061	0.019	0.17 *	-0.01	1		
Obsession	0.171 *	0.146 *	0.128 *	0.065	0.13	0.03 *	0.103	1	
Depression	0.344 *	0.168 *	0.208 *	0.163 *	0.22 *	0.1	0.066	0.113	1

Of all of the significant relationships, only one had a correlation coefficient greater than 0.4 ("Feel Alone" and "Low Self-Esteem"), and five had correlation coefficients greater than 0.3 ("Want To Escape" with "Feel Alone," "Shop Due To Stress" and "Depression," "Feel Alone" and "Shop To Fill Void," and "Low Self-Esteem" and "Shop For A High").

Factor analysis was performed on these nine variables using varimax rotation. Two factors were extracted with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Tables 6 and 7 illustrate this finding.

Table 6:
Motivational Factor Analysis
Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	2.43	26.983	26.983
2	1.25	13.85	40.834
3	0.98	10.923	51.757
4	0.94	10.448	62.205
5	0.9	10.045	72.249
6	0.79	8.762	81.012
7	0.68	7.573	88.584
8	0.55	6.141	94.725
9	0.48	5.275	100

The nine motivational variables used in the analysis loaded on the two significant factors as follows: Alone, Low Self-Esteem, Void, and Revenge all loaded highly on the first factor, while Escape, Stress, Obsession, Depression, and High all loaded highly on the second factor. Because of the pattern of these variables, factor #1 was named Hollow,

while factor #2 was named Freedom, creating two motivational groups of compulsive shoppers.

Table 7:
Motivational Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix

	1	2
Escape	0.155	0.759
Alone	0.65	0.298
Low Self-Esteem	0.705	0.174
Revenge	0.456	0.047
High	0.339	0.394
Void	0.718	-0.062
Stress	-0.169	0.724
Obsession	0.084	0.421
Depression	0.277	0.471

* 40.834% of variance explained

The question, then, is why did these variables load on these factors? What is the relationship between them? First, the relationship between the four variables that loaded highly on factor #1 will be examined. In a study of the depressed elderly population Kivela and Pahlaka (1987) used a factor analysis of the Self-Rating Depression Scale and found that low self-esteem and feelings of emptiness both loaded highly on the same factor.

Del Rosario (2006), in an examination of the 30-item Internalized Shame Scale (ISS) on college students, found that Emptiness and Loneliness loaded together as an

underlying factor in the scale, in spite of the ISS being designed to only have one overriding factor. This supports the findings of Cook (1987), who found the same underlying Emptiness and Loneliness factor within the ISS.

Roby (1998) found a significant relationship between the level of one's self-esteem and feelings of revenge, specifically that the higher one's self-esteem, the more likely he or she is to be a forgiving person. Conversely, the lower one's self-esteem, the more likely he or she is to be a vengeful person. This finding is supported by Brenneis (2000), who found that self-esteem, among other things, was a predictor of revenge. Finally, Rhue (1987), in a study of the fantasy-prone personality, found that people who were fantasy-prone were more likely to experience loneliness and have more thoughts of revenge toward those who have done them wrong.

A link between depression and escapism was discussed by Schreindorfer (2006), who argued that escape is not a coping strategy for dealing with depression, but instead one of the symptoms of it. Escapism, stress, and negative emotions were linked in a study by Watson (1999-2000), who researched predictors of personality disorder. This relationship was found again by Heckman (1999) in a study of middle-aged adults living with HIV. Heckman found that adults with higher levels of depression were also experiencing more stress and were more likely to distance themselves from a stressful situation by means of escapism. In the case of CS, the high that is experienced and reported by the authors is likely their escape. This relationship was found in a study conducted by Levy (2005) regarding ecstasy use in college students, who turned to the drug because of its ease of use and their desire to escape, among other reasons.

Based on the results of the factor analysis, two new dichotomous motivational variables were created: Hollow and Freedom. These variables indicated whether an author positively mentioned any of the previous nine motivational variables. Of the 197 authors in the data, 47.7% were identified as Freedom shoppers, while 26.9% were identified as Hollow shoppers. It is necessary to point out that these motivations are not mutually exclusive of each other, as 16.8% of the authors were identified as being motivated to shop for both reasons.

Management

Once it was determined that there were no apparent differences in the backgrounds of the Freedom and Hollow shoppers, seven management variables were constructed out of the existing variables in order to determine if there were any differences in the ways that they managed their addiction. These variables are "Sought Financial Help," "Did Not Seek Financial Help," "Sought Personal Help," "Did Not Seek Personal Help," "Concealed Their Behavior," "Organizational Methods," and "Shame." The frequencies of the variables used in the construction of these new variables can be found in Table 8. Unlike the motivational factors, management variables were not eliminated from the study if they occurred in less than 5% of the authors. This is because these factors were constructed based on the apparent similarity of the variables and with no intention of explaining as much variance as possible.

Table 8: Frequency of Management Variables

	Frequency
Have Declared Bankruptcy	6.60%
Currently In Debt Consolidation	6.10%
Have Never Declared Bankruptcy	4.06%
Have Never Been In Debt Consolidation	1.02%
Asked For Information On Bankruptcy	1.02%
Asked For Information on Debt Consolidation	2.03%
Pray	4.60%
Currently In A 12-Step Program	5.10%
Currently In Therapy	13.20%
Used To Pray	0.51%
Have Never Prayed	0%
Was In A 12-Step Program	3.05%
Have Never Been In A 12-Step Program	2.03%
Was In Therapy	2.54%
Have Never Been In Therapy	4.06%
Hide Their Purchases	14%
Lie To Their Partner	5%
Hide Their Bills	3%
Significant Other Does Not Know	9%
Using A Replacement Strategy	10%
Record Their Finances	6%
Return Their Purchases	11%
Donate Their Purchases	3%
Adhere To A Shopping List	5%
Feel Guilty	12%
Feel Ashamed	18%
Admitting Their Problem For The First Time	9%
Relapsed Into Old Shopping Behaviors	14%

The first new variable, "Sought Financial Help," indicates whether the subjects made use of bankruptcy or debt consolidation programs as a means of managing their growing financial problems. The variables used in the construction of this variable were "Have Declared Bankruptcy" and "Currently In Debt Consolidation." Both variables are mentioned by approximately 6% of the authors, and there is no significant correlation between them ($r = 0.018$). In every instance of either variable, the subjects seem to feel that taking advantage of any financial out is a final option. Jan writes, "Anyway, after a few years of this I had over $120,000 in debt and had no choice but to declare bankruptcy. There was no hope of repaying the debt, though I was making about $60,000. Never have I known such shame." A similar sentiment is repeated when Kristy states that "I finally threw in the towel recently and filed bankruptcy, but as a result I lost my home and all the equity I had in it." In regard to debt consolidation programs, Barbara writes, "Also, you can call your credit card (company) and ask them about any type of hardship plans they might have available. They could reduce your monthly payments. I was in the same boat as you, until I had no choice but to join a debt consoldiation [sic] program." In spite of both programs seeming to be a last-resort option to the authors, bankruptcy appears to be far less appealing than debt consolidation to some. For example, Keith writes, "I am new to this board--but I went through debt counseling/"credit counseling" with a non-profit agency and did NOT declare bankruptcy. I think for some it's a last resort prior to bankruptcy." It is this difference in opinions toward the programs that may explain their lack of a significant correlation.

"Did Not Seek Financial Help" is the opposite of "Sought Financial Help," in that the author has never made use of either program for any reason. Four variables were used to

define this: "Have Never Declared Bankruptcy," "Have Never Been In Debt Consolidation," "Asked For Information On Bankruptcy," and "Asked For Information On Debt Consolidation." Of these four variables, "Have Never Declared Bankruptcy" appears the most often in the data, though it should be pointed out the four variables do not appear very often. "Have Never Declared Bankruptcy" is a variable designed to indicate whether the authors have explicitly stated that they have never declared bankruptcy. Similarly, "Have Never Been In Debt Consolidation" indicates whether the authors explicitly indicated that they have never taken part in a debt consolidation program. "Asked For Information On Bankruptcy" falls into this category because it indicates whether an author wanted to know more about bankruptcy, which means that he or she had never actually taken advantage of this program. The same logic applies to the next variable, "Asked For Information On Debt Consolidation." This variable indicates whether the author requested info on debt consolidation programs.

Unlike the previous variable, there are some statistically significant relationships between these variables, and although the correlation coefficients here are high (the largest $r = 0.495$ between "Asked For Information On Debt Consolidation" and "Have Never Declared Bankruptcy"), there is no reason to believe that multicollinearity is an issue because the correlation coefficient is not remarkably high. The strength of these correlations could also be explained by the relatively low frequency of the variables, such that, for example, someone who is talking about why they have never declared bankruptcy is also talking about why they have never taken part in a debt consolidation program.

The most interesting aspect of this variable is not the people who have requested information on either financial program, but those who state that they have never or will never take advantage of them. Bankruptcy is discussed by Dwight, who says that "I have – but it's a *very* last option for me. Apart from the longer-term damage that would do to my credit, that would also be shirking my responsibilities." This sentiment is echoed back to him in a message from Karen, who says that "I feel the same way as you do about declaring bankruptcy...sometimes I wish I could – but I know I got myself into this jam and I need to get myself out. Also, you never know what might happen in the future. My husband just got a job offer and part of that is getting top security clearance. And that includes a major credit check. If we had a bankruptcy, he would have been passed over for the job."

Unlike bankruptcy as an option, debt consolidation programs appear to be denied by the authors for one of two reasons: a belief that they are not as helpful as they purport to be, or ignorance on the author's behalf as to what they actually are. The former concept is evident in the following message, written by Cynthia:

> "Has anyone done the debt consolidation thing before? I hear that those places are a total rip off. You end up paying them a ton of $$$ too. I was wondering if that was true. I have also heard it is not good for your credit report. I have thought about it a lot lately. You always see all those commercials on TV about debt. I hate it! I hate it when one of those comes on and my hubby is in the room with me. I feel like he can see my [sic] squirm! If anyone has any experience with this please let me know.........I am thinking of giving it a shot."

Dwight addressed the usefulness of debt consolidation programs when he observed that "I've looked into some debt counseling places, and while they're not a scam per se (they don't get your credit card #s and go on a shopping spree), they're not too useful.

They don't provide loans, they often charge for their services, and I already know not to use my credit cards all the time."

"Sought Personal Help" indicates whether the author made use of other help-seeking opportunities, specifically prayer, therapy, or a 12-step program such as Debtors Anonymous. Of these three component variables, "Currently In Therapy" appeared with the greatest frequency, being mentioned by approximately 13% of the authors, while "Currently In A 12-Step Program" is mentioned by 5% and "Pray" is mentioned by 4.5%.

The variable "Currently In Therapy" represents whether the subjects indicated that they are presently meeting with a therapist to discuss their problems with CS. This can be an invaluable resource, as it gives those with CS who have not yet divulged their secrets to their friends and family the opportunity to do so. Jennifer writes, "It's nice to have support and someone to know my secret (my husband doesn't know how bad things are either). I found therapy helpful in learning why I shop so compulsively, and why it is so important to me. Bottom line though, no one can do it for me -- the support is good, and the insight is helpful, but I'm the one who has to make the change. It's just easier said than done." The insightful aspect of discussing CS with a therapist is repeated when Rosie writes: "I also have a long history of eating disorders so therapy is nothing new to me. It has helped in the fact that it brings problems out into the open and helps you resolve your issues. I'm not sure if I've helped you at all but it feels good to talk about things."

A second help-seeking behavior that appeared frequently in the data is the concept of turning to a 12-step program, typically Debtor's Anonymous (DA), for help with managing one's compulsion to shop. Lindsay discussed her first meeting with DA: "My

meeting was very hard, yet very enlightening!! I wasn't sure what I was walking into, but I really enjoyed myself. Most of the way home I cried. Why? I think admitting that I can't control spending money is a very, very hard thing. I knew I needed help, but I wasn't sure what kind. I really think, DA is the place for me." Another view of 12-step work is offered by Dwight, a vocal proponent of the 12-step approach: "I had to restructure my life with 12-step work as well as make my new life transparent to my family instead of hiding things from them. Part of my program is to discuss all potential purchases with them...out in the open. The first step is to get all our past mistakes out in the open and then work on repairing the wreckage. Of course, we each have different families, so you alone can evaluate what the ramifications of 'getting it all out' will have."

The third and final help-seeking avenue utilized by the subjects in the data is a more spiritual one. The variable "Pray" indicates whether the subjects were relying upon prayer to help them understand and combat their CS. This is very accurately summed up by Ivy, when she says:

> "And my last piece of advise is to PRAY. In AA part of the program is to give it up to a higher power. My higher power is Heavenly father. He gives me strength each day. And I know that I CAN get this under control. The attonement od [sic] Jesus Christ assures me that I can. Because this is a destructive behavior. And it doesn't come from God. It's a temptation of Satan. And I pray each day and each time I shop, even for groceries, that I will be strong and not give in to this."

This sentiment is repeated when Andrea states: "Christianity hasn't made me perfect - I still struggle with shopping addiction, but at least I recognize that it's a problem, and I know that praying can help me resist the temptation to go on wild shopping sprees."

The resulting relationship between these three variables is interesting, as there is a significant positive correlation between the variables "Pray" and "Currently In A 12-Step

Program" (r = 0.282), but neither is highly correlated to "Currently In Therapy." However, because of the spiritual aspect of 12-step programs, virtually all of which require their members to turn to a "higher power" for guidance, it is not surprising that there is a correlation between prayer and belonging to a 12-step program.

Just as "Did Not Seek Financial Help" is the opposite of "Sought Financial Help," "Did Not Seek Personal Help" is the opposite of "Sought Personal Help." This variable was designed to indicate whether the subjects explicitly stated that they had either never taken part in individual or group therapy or had done so at one point and quit.

Similar to the variables used to construct "Did Not Seek Financial Help," there were very few instances of authors explicitly stating that they have not or will not take advantage of a particular help-seeking activity. This is evident in the variable "Have Never Prayed," which has a frequency of less than 0.001%, and "Used To Pray," which has a frequency of only 0.05%.

Unlike the negative prayer variables, there were enough instances of the authors discussing turning away from 12-step programs and individual therapy to warrant the creation of this larger management variable. The variables indicating that the author was once in or has never been a part of either individual therapy or 12-step programs provide a stark contrast to the authors who took advantage of these programs. For example, Cynthia says, "You metioned DA groups. There is no DA group where I live, but I did join one online and I did not get into that.................the preaching, etc. That turns me off! I too want a place to vent and let out my feelings. I know what I am doing is wrong................I don't need someone telling me to let it all go and let god." A similar sentiment regarding the attitude of Debtor's Anonymous can be found in the following

message from Karen: ""I went to DA while I lived in Denver, but now there isn't a group here, other than online. And I posted on there, but they can be self-righteous and it irritates me. I just want to vent...I don't want to be told how to vent."

While those who have turned away from 12-step programs seemed to do so because of the attitude of its members, those who turned away from professional therapy did not appear to do so for any specific reason. For instance, Becky discussed both therapy and DA when she wrote: "I've gone to a couple of DA meetings, but I just don't feel comfortable there. Everyone else seemed to be in so many other 12-step programs. And, they seemed to be so down about their situations that it just made me feel worse. I went to a counselor for awhile, but she didn't think it was an addiction." In contrast to this, Cynthia says that "I have done therapy. I guess I am so in denial right now..............I am not going to therapy right now. I blew it off. I am taking drugs though..............Remeron, Lexapro, klonopin. They don't help stop that urge to shop though. Nothing takes away that urge to shop!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Of the variables used in constructing the larger "Did Not Seek Personal Help" variable, there is only a significant correlation between the variables "Was In A 12-Step Program" and "Was In Therapy" ($r = 0.535$). The remaining correlations are both small and negative.

"Concealed Their Behavior" is a variable designed to indicate whether the authors exhibited any of four concealment behaviors found in the data. Four concealment variables were identified in the data: "Hide Their Purchases," "Lie To Their Partner," "Hide Their Bills," and "Significant Other Does Not Know." Of the four, "Hide Their

Purchases" occurred the most, a behavior exhibited by 14% of the authors, while "Hide Their Bills" occurred the least, exhibited by only 3% of the authors.

The first variable utilized in the construction of this component, "Hide Their Purchases," indicates whether the authors discussed hiding purchases from their families or friends. Lynn describes this behavior: "I sneaked to shops hiding the items in the boot of my car, the wardrobe, etc. I bought off the internet and had items sent to my Mother's so my husband wouldn't see them. When my mother started to say to me that my spending was out of control I got the things sent us but got my kids to hide the things before their father saw them. Even my kids started to comment about how much money I was spending." Tina describes a similar situation: "I smuggle things in too. If my husband is home when I have something, I hide it in the trunk of my car until he leaves. I too feel bad after spending the money, but like you, not bad enough to return them." Finally, she describes this behavior as follows:

> "When I buy all of these things I don't need, I often hide it from my boyfriend in our house, because if he knew of how much money I spent last week, he would be very disgusted with me. I often find myself hiding my purchases from him, or lie and say I didn't buy anything, when he asks if I went shopping. I think the main reason why we aren't married is because he hates my shopping addiction, and does not want to marry someone so irresponsible with money, considering he loves saving money, and I love spending it."

The variable "Hide Their Bills" is similar to "Hide Their Purchases" in that it discusses hiding behavior, but rather than the authors discussing hiding purchases from their loved ones, "Hide Their Bills" indicates whether the authors explicitly state that they hid credit card bills from them. Lucille writes, "I constantly shop at Gymboree and everyone there knows me and it's nice. My problem isn't just the shopping, but the fact that because of my shopping I screw up our finances then have to juggle bills around to

fake it for dh. This causes more problems, and every week I am scrambling around trying to fix last week's financial problems without letting dh in on what is going on. I hate that I do this."

The concepts of hiding bills as well as two other concepts in the Concealment variable are addressed when Cynthia says: "Well, I have managed to get myself into $25,000 worth of debt on several credit cards and he has NO clue about it. It would kill him if he knew and I am pretty sure he would leave me if he found out. These cc are in my name only and I have them sent to a post office box. I hate lying to him, but it is something I can't bring myself to tell him."

The idea of lying to one's spouse or the author's spouse just being ignorant of the degree to which the author is shopping represent the final components that make up this variable. Wendy writes, "I also buy stuff for my husband, and hide it among his other clothes. He doesn't even know the stuff is new. He has no idea how bad it is. He knows I like to shop, but he doesn't suspect there is a problem."

All of the variables utilized in the construction of the larger concealment variable are significantly correlated with the variable "Hide Their Purchases," with the strongest relationship existing with "Lie To Their Partner" ($r = 0.237$). Statistically significant correlations exist between some of the other variables, but nothing so large to warrant discussion.

The next variable, "Organizational Methods" speaks to the ways in which an author may pragmatically approach her compulsion. Put differently, it represents the ways in which an author may attempt to manage some of the results of her compulsion. Of the five variables used in the creation of the larger "Organizational Methods" variable,

"Return Their Purchases" appeared the most in the data, being mentioned positively and explicitly by 11% of the authors. In contrast, the variable "Donate Their Purchases" is mentioned by only 3% of the authors.

The first variable used in the creation of the Organization variable is "Using A Replacement Strategy," which indicates whether the authors explicitly state that they are actively exploring more healthy and positive activities other than shopping as a means of using the time and energy that was ordinarily dedicated to shopping. An example of this can be found in a message written by Walter, who states that he "had to learn to accept I cannot have all these good deals and still live a good life, so one of them had to go. I now have many pastimes other than shopping and looking to buy stuff as my hobbies." Mickie echoes this concept: "The only way I have been able to combat shopping is to put other things in their place. I cannot shop especially via TV or internet if I am out gardening, exercising, etc. If I am hurt by someone or feeling isolated or lonely I go somewhere. Even if it is to the movies. Obviously I can not go shopping. The temptation to shop will eventually pass."

The next variable used in the construction of the organization variable is "Donate Their Purchases," which indicates whether the authors explicitly state that they have donated to charity items they purchased. In a message on this subject, Alexandra writes, "Two days ago I was able to box up 2 large containers and 2 large bags for a donation. My goal is 2-3 boxes or bags each week to be taken out of the house and either donated or consigned. I met that goal and now want to do more." Relating a story about moving into a new house and coming to terms with the number of her possessions, Jan writes: "I

swore I would buy no more. When I couldn't fit everything into the spacious double closets that fill this house, I donated piles of the stuff to the Salvation Army."

Similar to donating excess goods, the variable "Return Their Purchases" indicates whether the authors returned goods in an attempt to recoup some of their financial losses and lessen the amount of clutter in their homes, though the effectiveness of this is questionable. For example, Sharon says that "While I am in considerable debt, I happen to also be a chronic "returner." I return 5 out of 6 things I buy - but I am in debt nonetheless because I do it so much!!" This idea of being labeled as a compulsive returner is repeated when Pam says ""I wish I didn't care about material things. I don't even know why I buy a lot of the things I buy. Sometimes I buy a ton of clothes only to discover a couple of weeks later that I really don't like them. One of my friends has nicknamed me "serial returner" - I'm constantly buying things and returning them. It's so pathetic."

The fourth conceptual variable used in the creation of the larger organization variable is "Adhere To A Shopping List," which indicates whether the authors state using shopping lists as a means of encouraging self-restraint. Andrea advises the group to "Never, never, never, go to a store without writing your list FIRST, before you leave. When you get to the store, ONLY buy what's on the list!!!" This is repeated in a message by Walter, when he says that "Whenever I shop it is by the direction of a pre-planned list...no list, then no shopping. I go to the shops only on the list and buy what is on the list and that is it. I don't walk down every aisle in the store twice like I used to wondering if I am missing out on something."

The fifth and final variable utilized here is "Record Their Finances", which indicates whether the authors say that they have begun keeping detailed records of their spending, including the bills they incur outside of their CS. Phyllis advised the group to "Track your spending. Track every single penny that comes in and out of your life, in every way. Assign categories, as specific or vague as you want. Like, you can put all groceries under 'food' but I know some people that create littler categories like 'meat' 'snacks' and so on. After a 1-2 months, you should have a pretty good idea where your spending occurs."

Virtually all of the component variables here are significantly and positively correlated with each other, with the exception of "Donate Their Purchases" with "Record Their Finances" and "Adhere To A Shopping List." The strongest relationship here exists between "Using A Replacement Strategy" and "Return Their Purchases" (r = 0.266). As with the previous constructed variable, "Concealed Their Behavior," these correlations are not so large that they warrant further discussion, or any fears of multicollinearity.

Finally, "Shame" was constructed to indicate whether the authors had explicitly stated feeling guilty about their compulsion or ashamed that they were addicted. Two variables were utilized in the creation of this variable: "Feel Guilty," "Feel Ashamed," "Admitting Their Problem For The First Time," and "Relapsed Into Old Shopping Behaviors."

In an introductory message, Miriam writes: "Hi, I think I may have a problem. I know this Problem has been going on for awhile, but my hubby freaked when he saw out credit card bill last night. He took my cc away. I feel ashamed and embarrassed by it all. I want to stop shopping, but I love clothes and I work full time so what the heck..... I don't want my dh to be disappointed in me and I need to curb this spending I am glad to come here

and just get support." Here, we see that the author has admitted her problem to herself

and is ashamed of her situation. A similar story is told by Helen: "I think I have a

serious problem with shopping. I constantly shop, for clothes, housewares, knick knacks,

anything I can. I go into a store and I just have to buy something. I've managed to come

down from walking into a store and buying stuff without looking at price tags. Now I am

able to stop myself if something is really overpriced. But that's not enough. I have fallen

back on my bills and I am broke. I find myself applying for credit cards to have some

spending power. I'm back on bills and creditors are calling me. I find myself in

desperation, looking for ways to get money. I'm so ashamed of myself." From these

stories, the existence of shame and guilt in the life of someone suffering from CS should

be evident. Interestingly enough, "Feel Ashamed" and "Feel Guilty" are not highly or

significantly correlated with each other.

Once the Management variables were constructed, each was turned into a simple

dichotomy: if the authors had a 1 in any of the variables used in the creation of the new

variable, then they were given a 1 in the new variable. Bivariate correlations were run on

them before and after being reduced to a dichotomy in order to determine if there was any

chance of multicollinearity existing between any pair of the variables before the next step

of the analysis. While significant relationships were found, there was only cause for

concern in the relationship between "Sought Financial Help" and "Did Not Seek

Financial Help." The correlation coefficient ($r = .213$) between this pair of variables

prior to being dichotomized was found to be statistically significant ($p = .003$).

Furthermore, a difficulty in establishing time order was found between this pair of

variables. Because these data are cross-sectional and cover a substantial period of time, it

was possible for the members of the group to transition from one form of behavior to another, in this case, to say that they had never declared bankruptcy at one point during the data collection, and then go through the process of declaring bankruptcy and say that they had done so at another point during the data collection. Finally, the relatively low rate of occurrence for this variable in comparison to the other constructed management variables was enough to warrant removing it from the analysis.

Unfortunately, this issue of time-order also must be addressed in regard to the "Sought Personal Help" and "Did Not Seek Personal Help" variables. While the correlation coefficient between this pair of variables is not significantly or substantially high either before or after they were dichotomized ($r = .091$ and $r = .092$, respectively), the issue of members of the group being coded as exhibiting both qualities simultaneously arises. Six authors in the data were coded as exhibiting both characteristics simultaneously, and unlike the previous case, the frequency of "Did Not Seek Personal Help" is high enough – approximately 10% of the authors were coded as exhibiting these behaviors – to justify keeping it in the model. That being said, it would be logically inconsistent to remove "Did Not Seek Financial Help" and keep "Did Not Seek Personal Help." Therefore, the six cases where this problem existed were excluded from the final analysis.

Multivariate Analysis

Having created the larger management variables and reduced them to dichotomous variables, logistic regression analyses were performed, using the set of 6 management variables as the independent variable and the motivational dichotomies as the dependent variables. Three models were created for each motivational dichotomy, for two reasons: to better understand the ways in which the independent variables impacted the dependent

variable and influenced each other, and to attempt to establish some time-order between the variables. The first model regressed the motivational variable on three management variables: "Conceal," "Shame," and "Did Not Seek Personal Help." These three variables were used in the first model because it seems likely that someone who was in the early stages of recovery would be exhibiting some or all of the behaviors encompassed by these variables. The second model included all six of the management variables, under the assumption that a shopper in the middle stages of recovery could be exhibiting aspects of all six of these behaviors. Finally, the third model removed the three variables from the first model, and regressed the motivational variable only on "Sought Financial Help," "Sought Personal Help," and "Organizational Behaviors." Table 9, below, illustrates the findings of these models involving the "Freedom" motivation.

Table 9:
Freedom Shoppers Logistic Regression Models

Variables	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	B	Sig.		Exp(B)	B	Sig.		Exp(B)	B	Sig.		Exp(B)
Concealed	-0.21	0.57		0.81	-0.38	0.32		0.68				
Shame	0.82	0.02	**	2.23	0.68	0.05	*	1.98				
No Help	0.58	0.31		1.78	0.56	0.33		1.75				
Financial					0.24	0.6		1.27	0.35	0.43		1.41
Organization					0.73	0.058		2.07	0.77	0.04	**	2.17
Help Seeking					0.4	0.34		1.49	0.36	0.37		1.43

*: p < .05
**: p < .01

In the first model, the only significant variable is "Shame," which increases the odds of a person being a Freedom shopper by approximately 2. In the second model, "Shame" is

also the only significant variable, although its significance has been reduced. Also, the "Organization" variable is very nearly significant, with a p = 0.058. In the final model, the only significant variable is "Organization," with a p = 0.04. Looking at the impact of other variables in spite of the dominance of "Shame" throughout these models, it seems that it may be necessary to remove "Shame" from the equation in order to get a better understanding of the role of each variable, if it has a similar impact on the "Hollow" models (see Table 10).

Table 10:
Hollow Shoppers
Logistic Regression
Models

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	B	Sig.		Exp(B)	B	Sig.		Exp(B)	B	Sig.		Exp(B)
Concealed	0.94	0.01	**	2.51	0.92	0.02	*	2.5				
Shame	0.77	0.05	*	2.14	0.54	0.19		1.71				
No Help	0.4	0.53		1.493	0.69	0.29		2				
Financial					-1.23	0.06		0.29	-0.99	0.11		0.37
Organization					0.6	0.15		1.83	0.86	0.03	*	2.35
Help Seeking					1.274	0.004	**	3.59	1.36	0.001	**	3.91

*: $p < .05$
**: $p < .01$

A different pattern arises across these three models than in the previous analysis. In the first model, "Concealed" and "Shame" are both statistically significant, at p = 0.01 and p = 0.05, respectively. This is in contrast to the first model in the previous analysis, wherein only "Shame" was significant. In the next model, "Shame" drops out of the significant range, while "Concealed" remains and "Sought Help Seeking Behaviors" is also found to be significant, at p = 0.02 and p = 0.004, respectively. The second model in the previous analysis only showed "Shame" as being significantly related to the dependent variable. Finally, the third model shows that "Organization" is significant at p = 0.03, while "Sought Personal Help" is significant at p = 0.001. Again, this is different

from the third model in the previous analysis, as while "Organization" is significant in both instances, "Sought Personal Help" is only significant in relation to the Hollow shoppers.

To summarize these differences, "Shame" was found to be significantly related to both Hollow and Freedom shoppers in Model 1, while "Concealed" was also found to be significant to Freedom shoppers, but not Hollow shoppers. "Shame" continued to be significant in relation to Freedom shoppers in the second model – it was the only statistically significant variable in this model – while it was no longer significant in relation to Hollow shoppers, replaced by "Concealed," which carried over from the first model, and "Sought Personal Help." Finally, "Organization" was found to be statistically significant in the final model for both Hollow and Freedom shoppers; however, "Sought Personal Help" was also found to be significant for Hollow shoppers.

A number of conclusions can be reached from the results of the above models. People classified as Freedom shoppers appear to hold onto their shame and their guilt longer than Hollow shoppers do, without actively seeking help from counselors or therapists throughout the duration of their compulsive behavior. That no variables are significantly related to them in any step of the model besides "Shame" and "Organization" seems to depict this type of shopper as someone whose compulsion has been very internalized; they are ashamed of their problem, and they are going to cope with it on their own terms, in hopes of correcting their behavior without any outside help, be it financial or otherwise.

In contrast, people classified as Hollow shoppers are more likely to seek out professional help, in the form of therapy, counseling, or 12-step programs. This character

trait is significant in both the second and third models, whereas "Shame" is not – but this does not necessarily mean that these shoppers are not ashamed of their behavior, as this is the group that is more likely to conceal their actions from those around them. Another interesting point is that shoppers in this category are also managing their behavior through various organizational techniques. While this variable is not as significantly related to Hollow shoppers as it is to Freedom shoppers, its impact is very similar: the odds of a person falling into either of these shopping categories is increased by approximately 2 times if they are utilizing organizational methods.

Discussion

At this point in the study, it is necessary to revisit the operational definition of compulsive shopping, developed by Benson (2000):

> The most widely used definitional criteria define the disorder, in essence, as maladaptive preoccupation with buying or shopping, whether impulses or behavior, that either (1) is experienced as irresistible, intrusive, and/or senseless or (2) results in frequent buying of more than can be afforded or of items that are not needed, or shopping for longer periods of time than intended. The buying preoccupations, impulses, or behaviors cause marked distress, are time consuming, significantly interfere with social or occupational functioning, or result in financial problems, and they do not occur exclusively during periods of hypomania or mania. In short, the compulsive buyer is a person who allows shopping to destructively deflect resources – whether of time, energy, or money – from the fabrication of everyday life (2000: xxv).

It is clear from the findings of this research that the compulsive shoppers studied here fit Benson's definition almost perfectly. They view their behavior as senseless, yet irresistible, and oftentimes it drives them to live far beyond their means. Many members of the group were faced with severe financial trauma; many of them already had experience with bankruptcy and felt that they were on their way to declaring bankruptcy for the second or third time.

Returning to the definition of addiction developed by Melona (2006), I think it is clear that CS is a true addiction. In addition to feeling that they do not have the power to control their shopping, both of the significant motivational factors found above point to people who are unhappy with the circumstances of their own lives, whatever they may be. Furthermore, the need for some shoppers to utilize replacement strategies speaks to the more traditional definition of addiction: these are people who are trying to cope with their withdrawal symptoms and are hoping to replace the physical and mental high that shopping gave them with something else.

The question of whether CS could be classified as an addiction was the first of three broad questions posed at the beginning of this study. The second question asked was whether CS affects more men than women. The findings of this study confirm what was found in the literature: CS does appear to be a primarily female problem.

The third question posed at the beginning of the study was whether CS cuts across race, class, and gender lines. Unfortunately, it was impossible to determine the race of any of the subjects in the study without contacting the subjects personally. Regarding the rest of the question, as has already been stated, this study determined that CS primarily

affects women, and so it does not cut across gender lines. However, there was no evidence to say definitively that CS is restricted to women in the upper, middle, or lower class. The subjects in this study shopped compulsively at grocery stores, private jewelry parties, and everywhere in between.

Of the conclusions that can be reached by this study, one of the most significant is that CS is a far more complex phenomenon than had been previously reported. While both Boundy (2000) and Campbell (2000) developed typologies that attempted to clarify just what CS is, the degree to which the motivational factors to shop overlapped with each other in this study leads one to believe that this compulsion is not as simple as previous research claims. This is reinforced by the ways in which shoppers manage their addiction. This study found that those who were shopping in order to fill some sort of void in their lives – the shoppers with low self-esteem, the shoppers suffering from loneliness – turned to the traditional help-seeking outlets as a means of trying to get their compulsion under control. Conversely, those who were shopping as a means of freeing themselves, those who were battling stress and depression, took a more practical approach to managing their addiction. This group shunned therapy and 12-step programs and instead took a more pragmatic approach, returning or donating unneeded goods, recording their finances and forcing themselves to buy only what was on pre-planned shopping lists. Still, both groups experienced a great deal of shame due to their behavior.

This study also found that depression and anxiety were not very valuable in explaining compulsive shopping, contrary to what was found in the literature. In this study, both depression and anxiety were virtually non-factors in terms of determining the significant motivations that could lead to CS. The anxiety variable was removed from the analysis

altogether due to only a few subjects saying that they shopped because they were anxious. While the depression variable loaded highly on the Freedom factor, it did not have the highest loading on that factor.

Rather than anxiety and depression being the most significant motivating factors in compulsive shopping, this study found that a need for personal freedom and a feeling of emptiness were the main motivating causes. Should this be found in future studies of CS, treatment of the addiction could be changed drastically: instead of medicating people with CS for their anxiety or depression, steps could be taken to determine why they feel so hollow inside, or why they feel this drive to free themselves from their daily lives. If those problems can be addressed without medication, then the shoppers could go on to lead more fulfilling lives, without the constant threat of shopping looming over them should they stop their medication. Future research on compulsive shopping should also focus on determining the extent of the differences between these two motivational factors, if this analysis can be replicated. If this dataset can be expanded to increase the number of subjects in the analysis, the similarities and differences between shoppers that were found in this study can be clarified and therefore better understood.

Appendix A: Coding Categories

Realshop: The respondent is suffering from symptoms of compulsive shopping.

ForSomeone: The respondent is contributing to the group due to someone other than himself or herself being a compulsive shopper.

Age: The age of the respondent, if given.

College: The respondent says he or she went to or is presently in college.

AmntDebt: The specific amount of debt that a respondent says that he or she or "his or her shopper" has incurred.

Kids: The respondent has children.

SigOther: The respondent mentions having a significant other.

BailedOut: The respondent discusses someone bailing him or her out financially at an earlier date.

Job: The respondent says that he or she is employed in some way.

Prayer: The respondent states he or she has relied on prayer (any) to help guide him or her through the addiction.

WasPray: The respondent had been someone who prayed with some regularity in his or her life, and had since turned it away from it for any reason.

NeverPray: The respondent explicitly states that he or she has never turned to prayer.

InfoPray: The respondent is interested in finding out information about prayer.

RecPray: The respondent recommends prayer to other members of the group as a means of alleviating their suffering.

In12: The respondent is presently a member of a 12-step program, typically Debtor's Anonymous.

Was12: The respondent was at one time in a 12-step program and left without ever returning for any reason.

Never12: The respondent states that he or she has never taken part in any 12-step program.

Info12: The respondent requests information on 12-step programs.

Rec12: The respondent recommends 12-step programs to the other members of the group.

InTher: The respondent is presently working with a therapist.

WasThe: The respondent once worked with a therapist, but has left and never returned.

NeverTher: The respondent has never worked with a therapist.

InfoThe: The respondent is interested in finding out more information about therapy.

RecTher: The respondent recommends therapy to the other members of the group as a way of alleviating their suffering.

Religion: The respondent discusses his or her religion or spiritual beliefs.

Poorfam: The respondent explicitly states that he or she came from a poor family.

DoAgain: The respondent discusses having gone through cycles of good and bad behavior in the past, i.e., periods of controlled and uncontrolled shopping.

Anxgen: The respondent suffers from general anxiety, but does not explicitly state that he or she shops because of the anxiety.

Learned: The respondent indicates that he or she shops because he or she learned that this was an acceptable behavior, typically from a mother or grandmother.

RetPurch: The respondent indicates that he or she returned unnecessary purchases.

Donate: The respondent indicates that he or she donated excessive purchases.

RecFinance: The respondent indicates that he or she has begun keeping detailed records of his or her finances as a way to control spending.

Shoplist: The respondent indicates that he or she has begun using a shopping list as a means of control, or that he or she is making a list of the items he or she wanted to buy impulsively, so they can be bought at a later date.

HidePurc: The respondent discusses hiding purchases from his or her significant other.

LieSpouse: The respondent discusses lying to his or her spouse about whether he or she shopped.

HideBill: The respondent discusses hiding bills from family members and/or spouse.

SigDK: The respondent explicitly states that his or her spouse does not know the degree of his or her shopping and/or the severity of the debt it has caused.

CheckDebit: The respondent discusses switching to using a debit card.

Credit: The respondent indicates primarily using credit cards.

Ebay: The respondent indicates that he or she use the internet for shopping.

Catalogue: The respondent indicates that he or she use catalogues to shop.

QVC: The respondent discusses using QVC/Home Shopping Club/etc to shop.

Store: The respondent discusses physically going to the store (i.e., the mall, grocery store, etc).

BuyGift: The respondent discusses having a problem buying things for friends and family members.

Ashamed: The respondent feels ashamed of himself or herself for shopping.

Guilt: The respondent feels guilty about his or her behavior.

Void: The respondent explicitly states that he or she feels shopping compulsively fills a void, hole, or feelings of emptiness in him or her.

Lonely: The respondent says that he or she shops because of feelings of lonliness.

Escape: The respondent says that he or she shops because of the need to escape from his or her normal life.

Revenge: The respondent says that he or she shops in order to get revenge on someone, typically a parent or spouse.

Anxshop: The respondent says that he or she shops because of anxiety.

High: The respondent says that he or she shops in order to experience a physical high.

Stress: The respondent says that he or she shops as a means of alleviating the stress experienced in his or her normal life.

WantContr: The respondent says that he or she shops because he or she wants to have control.

Obsess: The respondent says that he or she shops because of feelings of being obsessed with the goods or items that he or she is buying.

ThnkShpFrnd: The respondent says that he or she shops because it will make them popular.

KnowClerks: The respondent says that the employees of the stores he or she frequents know the respondent by name.

Alone: All mentions of loneliness, thinking shopping will result in popularity, wanting friends, and shopping for adult interaction.

Esteem: The respondent says that he or she shops because he or she is suffering from low self-esteem.

Depress: The respondent says he or she shops because of depression.

NoSC: The respondent says that he or she has no control over his or her shopping.

AnyAbuse: The respondent indicates that he or she has suffered any physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at any point in his or her life.

Medicate: The respondent indicates that he or she is taking any type of prescription medication.

OverEat: The respondent indicates that he or she has a problem with overeating.

Spousesupp: The respondent indicates that his or her significant other recognizes his or her problem and will give him or her support, emotionally and financially, through recovery.

FellOff: The respondent indicates that he or she has relapsed into old shopping behaviors since joining the group.

Recbooks: The respondent recommends that the members of the group buy any books related to compulsive shopping.

Compareadd: The respondent compares compulsive shopping to other addictions, such as alcoholism or gambling.

Admit: The respondent admits for the first time that they have a problem with compulsive shopping.

Clutter: The respondent discusses that he or she has problems with clutter as a result of his or her compulsion.

Directcont: The respondent's spouse tried methods of direct control in order to stop him or her from shopping compulsively, such as taking away his or her checkbook or cutting up his or her credit cards.

ControlFi: The respondent says that he or she control his or her family's finances.

Havebank: The respondent has already declared bankruptcy at least once.

Nobank: The respondent has never declared bankruptcy.

Infobank: The respondent requests more information on declaring bankruptcy and its ramifications.

Havedebt: The respondent states that he or she is already enrolled in a debt consolidation program of some sort.

Nodebt: The respondent states that he or she has never taken part in any kind of debt consolidation programs.

Infodebt: The respondent requests more information on debt consolidation programs.

Rationaliz: The respondent explicitly states that he or she find ways to rationalize shopping during the act.

Hadtohave: The respondent states that he or she had to have something seen while shopping (i.e., it was on sale, it was on clearance) in order to justify his or her spending.

Justmore: The respondent says that he or she rationalizes spending by saying that he or she is already in severe debt, and X-amount more will not make any difference.

Appendix B: Human Subjects Acceptance

November 9, 2005

Dear Mr. Wilczak:

The CAS-Human Subjects Committee has considered your application, #2205, "Compulsive Spending" and we consider it EXEMPT. An EXEMPT rating means that the proposal does not need further consideration by the University Human Subjects Committee and you may proceed with your research. Please save a copy of this email for submission to the Graduate School if you plan to use this material for a Master's degree.

Good luck with your endeavors, and your career.

Sincerely,
Michael J. Brabec, Chair
CAS-HSC

References

Ahrne, Goran. 1974. "Normative Behavior, Reification and Role Distance Applied to

Consumer Behavior." Acta Sociologica 17: 330-343.

Arenson, Gloria. 1991. *Born to Spend: How to Overcome Compulsive Spending*. HSI

and TAB Books.

Babbie, Earl. 2001 *The Practice of Social Research*. 9th edition. Wadsworth Publishing.

Baumeister, Roy F. 1988. "Masochism as escape from self." Journal of Sex Research 25:

28-59

------. 1990. "Anxiety and deconstruction: On escaping the self." Pp 259-291   in *Self-inference processes: The Ontario symposium*, edited by James M. Olson   and Mark Zanna. Hillsdale, NJ, England : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Becker, Howard S. 1991. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. The Free Press, New York, New York.

Benson, April Lane. 2000. *I Shop, Therefore, I Am: Compulsive Buying & The Search For Self*. Rowman & Littlefield publishing.

Black, Donald W.; Repertinger, Susan; Gaffney, Gary R.; Gabel, Janelle. 1998. "Family history and psychiatric comorbidity in persons with compulsive buying: Preliminary findings." American Journal of Psychiatry 155: 960-963.

------. 2001. "Compulsive buying disorder: Definition, assessment, epidemiology and clinical management." CNS Drugs 15: 17-27.

Boundy, Donna. "When Money is the Drug." In: *I Shop, Therefore, I am*. April Lane Benson [ed]. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. pp 3-27.

Brenneis, Michael Joseph. 2000. "Personality and demographic factors predicting conflicted attitudes toward authority in clergy who have completed residential psychiatric treatment." Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences 61 (2-A).

Campbell, Colin. "Shopaholics, Spendaholics, and the Question of Gender." In: *I Shop, Therefore, I am*. Benson, April Lane [ed]. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. pp 57-76.

"Can You Afford It… Facts, Figures and Statistics." http://credit.about.com/cs/frugality/a/081001.htm. c. 2004.

Cook, David R. 1987. "Measuring shame: The Internalized Shame Scale." Alcoholism

Treatment Quarterly 4: 197-215.

Coser, Lewis A. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social

Context, 2nd edition..* Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

"Credit Card and Debt Statistics Database,"

http://www.debtsmart.com/pages/debt_stats_01080114.html. Compiled by Scott

Bilker, c. 2006

Crossley, Craig D. 2005. "Victims' reaction to social undermining." Dissertation

Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering Vol 66(5-B).

Dittmar, Helga; Drury, John. 2001. "Self-image--is it in the bag? A qualitative

comparison between 'ordinary' and 'excessive' consumers." Journal of

Economic Psychology 21: 109-142.

Dittmar, Helga; Long, Karen; Meek, Rosie. 2004. "Buying on the Internet: Gender

differences in on-line and conventional buying motivations." Sex Roles 50: 423-

444

Duck, Robert James. "Bully/victim relationships and school violence: Evaluating

patterns of aggression." Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The

Sciences and Engineering Vol 65 (5-B).

Duval, Shelley; Wicklund, Robert A. 1973. "Effects of objective self-awareness on

attribution of causality." Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 9: 17-31.

Easterlin, Richard A; Crimmins, Eileen M. 1997. "American Youth Are Becoming More

Materialistic." P. 67-83 in *Citizen Politics in Post-Industrial Societies*, edited by

Terry Clark Nichols and Michael Rempel. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Faber, Ronald J.; Vohs, Kathleen D. 2004. "To buy or not to buy?: Self-control and self-regulatory failure in purchase behavior." P. 509-524 in *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*, edited by Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs. New York, NY, US : Guilford Press.

Faber, Ronald J. "A Systematic Investigation into Compulsive Buying." In: *I Shop, Therefore, I am*. Benson, April Lane [ed]. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. pp 27-55

Franke, R.H.; Kaul, J.D. "The Hawthorne Experiments." American Sociological Review, 1978, 43, 623-643.

Goldman, Ramona. "Compulsive Buying as an Addiction." In: *I Shop, Therefore, I am*. Benson, April Lane [ed]. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. pp 245-268.

Gottfredson, Michael R., and Hirschi, Travis. 1990. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.

Gove, Walter R.; Wilmoth, Charles. 1990. "Risk, Crime, and Neurophysiologic Highs: A Consideration of Brain Processes That May Reinforce Delinquent and Criminal Behavior." in *Crime in Biological, Social, and Moral Contexts,* edited by Lee Eliis and Harry Hoffman. Praeger Publishers, New York.

Halperin, David A.; Glick, Jane. 2003. "Collectors, accumulators, hoarders, and hoarding perspectives." Addictive Disorders & Their Treatment 2: 47-51.

Kern, Roger. 2000. *Where's the Action? An Analysis of the Motivation of Prostitutes' Clients*. PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University.

Kivela, Sirkka-Liisa. 1987. "Factor structure of the Zung Self-rating Depression Scale among a depressed elderly population." International Journal of Psychology 22:

289-300.

Koran, Lorrin M.; Bullock, Kim D.; Hartston, Heidi J.; Elliott, Michael A.; D'Andrea, Vincent. 2002. "Citalopram treatment of compulsive shopping: An open-label study." Journal of Clinical Psychiatry 63: 704-708.

LaRose, Robert; Eastin, Matthew S. 2002. "Is online buying out of control? Electronic commerce and consumer self-regulation." Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media Special Issue: New media and the commercial sphere 46: 549-564.

Lawrence, Lauren. 1990. "The psychodynamics of the compulsive female shopper." American Journal of Psychoanalysis 50: 67-70.

Lee, Shirley; Mysyk, Avis. 2004. "The Medicalization of Compulsive Buying." Social Science & Medicine 58: 1709-1718.

Lejoyeux, Michel; Valerie Tassain; Jacquelyn Solomon; Jean Adès. 1997. "Study of compulsive buying in depressed patients." Journal of Clinical Psychiatry 58: 169-173.

Levesque Ware, Claudette. 2002. "Consumerism, Credit Cards, and College Students.". Dissertation Abstracts International, A: The Humanities and Social Sciences 63: 1577-A

Manning, Robert D. 1995. "Consumer Credit and Debt: An Emergent Crisis or Convenience in the Golden Years." Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP).

McElroy, S.L.; K.A. Phillips; P.E. Keck, Jr. 1994. "Obsessive Compulsive Spectrum Disorder." Journal of Clinical Psychiatry 55: 33-51.

Mendola, Annette M. 2004. "A critique of the disease model of addiction." Dissertation

    Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences 65 (1-A).

Merton, Robert K. 1957. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. The Free Press, New

    York.

O'Kane, John. 2001. "Class, Liberal Pluralism and Counterhegemony." Cultural Studies

    15: 295-325.

Rhue, Judith W. 1987. "Fantasy proneness: Developmental antecedents." Journal of

    Personality 55: 121-137.

Roberts, James A.; Chris Manolis. 2000. "Baby boomers and busters: An exploratory

    investigation of attitudes toward marketing, advertising and consumerism."

    Journal of Consumer Marketing 17: 481-497.

Roby, Dorothea Christie. 1998. "Forgiveness, parental nurturance and self-esteem."

    Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences

    (8-A).

Schreindorfer, Lisa S. 2002. "Personality and coping function in chronic depression."

    Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences And Engineering

    Vol 63(5-B).

Shipman, Alan. 2004. "Lauding the Leisure Class: Symbolic Content and Conspicuous

    Consumption." Review of Social Economy 62: 277-289.

Strauss. Anselm; Barney Glaser. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Aldine,

    Chicago.

Sullivan, Teresa A; Elizabeth Warren; Lawrence Jay Westbrook. "Precarious

    Prosperity." 2001. "Concerning Critical Financial Situations in the Middle Class."

Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales 138: 19-33

Udry, J. Richard. 1965. "Sociology and Biology: What Biology Do Sociologists Need To Know?" Social Forces 73: 1267-1279.

Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Macmillan Publishing, New York; Dover Publications, New York.

Wolff, Richard D. 2005. "Ideological State Apparatuses, Consumerism, and U.S. Capitalism: Lessons for the Left." Rethinking Marxism 17: 223-235

Young, Kevin. 2004. "The Other Side of the Market: Social Governance in Neoliberal World Order and the Economy of Passive Mitigation." Alternate Routes 20: 149-177.