

ALL THAT REMAINS

The influence of shopping addictions and the fast fashion industry in terms of mental wellbeing and the environment.



CHRONIC CUSTOMERS

The mental and emotional toll of clinical shopping addictions

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Have you ever heard a friend remark, “I’m about to do some serious retail therapy” after receiving their monthly paycheck? Although the term is often used as a harmless joke, “retail therapy” is actually a sign and symptom of a much more serious condition called Compulsive buying disorder (CBD). CBD is the clinical diagnosis of a shopping addiction.

“Compulsive Buying Disorder is characterized by excessive shopping cognitions and buying behavior that leads to distress or impairment. Found worldwide, the disorder has a lifetime prevalence of 5.8% in the US general population,” the National Library of Medicine said.

Given that CBD impacts less than 6% of the US population, simply loving to shop doesn’t equate to a CBD diagnosis. Clinical shopping addictions require expert evaluation and can sometimes warrant treatment.

“Persons with CBD are preoccupied with shopping and spending, and devote significant time to these behaviors. The two aspects - shopping and spending - are intertwined. Persons with CBD often describe an increasing level of urge or anxiety that can only lead to a sense of completion when a purchase is made,” the National Library of Medicine said.

The relief following a purchase led to the concept of “retail therapy” being coined. Retail therapy describes shopping with the goal of improving mood or avoiding difficult emotions. Turns out, hormones such as dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins can be released during the shopping experience.

“Some people think these hormones only get released when you actually purchase an item, but it begins well before that. It can start before you even leave the house because you’re delighting in all the possibilities. Your happy hormones surge through the whole journey,” Dr. Susan Albers said to the Cleveland Health Clinic.

A study by the National Library of Medicine found that the onset of shopping addictions often occurs in one’s early to late twenties. Unsurprisingly, this correlates with financial independence and the establishment of a credit account for many young adults. Additionally, shopping has become easier than ever in the digital age.

“Not only does the growing presence of online shopping options make it so much easier to buy anything and everything, but constant advertisement and

the culture around trends make it feel more necessary to spend online like everyone else,” junior Katelyn Omer said.

Unsurprisingly, research has observed a positive correlation between the digitization of shopping and cases of shopping addictions.

“A recent study tracked the on-line shopping habits of people with a shopping addiction and found that a third of the participants had developed an online shopping version of CBD,” a publication by Addiction Center said.

Given the financial and mental burden that shopping addictions have on affected individuals, it is important to seek resources to avoid monetary ruin. If access to resources is limited, positive behaviors and hobbies such as mindfulness and art can help regulate hormones and calm anxiety.

The Cleveland Health Clinic also suggests that, “Applying the theory of anticipation and saving up for your reward gives you something to look forward to, which creates excitement and a release of dopamine over time. You’ll be surprised at how happy you can feel working toward those positive results,” Dr. Albers said.

Omer echoes this sentiment, sharing that, “One time, I saved for a few weeks to buy a dress I wanted. Saving definitely makes buying more rewarding because you know you earned it and can feel excited about your purchase.”

With consumerism and overconsumption becoming a norm in many societies, the National Library of Medicine predicts that the prevalence of shopping addictions will only increase. However, establishing healthy relationships with money from an early age can prevent you from becoming a chronic customer.

BINGE SHOPPING

Excessive, quick shopping sprees with high intensity and instability are key factors to this addiction. A loss of control and feelings of guilt can also be present.

IMPULSE BUYING

This type of addiction is characterized by unprompted, sporadic shopping sprees with no thought process or reason behind them.

SHOPAHOLIC SUBSETS

COLLECTORS

While many people collect specific items, it becomes a challenge once one prioritizes expanding their collection over their financial situation or wellbeing.

BARGAIN HUNTING

Typically, this addiction allows individuals to rationalize their expenses as they are always justifying their purchases because they might be getting items on clearance, coupons, or special deals.

Q. How would you personally describe your own shopping habits?

A. At times, humbling. When I’m getting reading in the morning and trying to find an outfit to wear and I’m like wow, I have no clothes, but when I walk in [my closet] and see this mass amount of articles [of clothing], I’m like wow, there’s lots of people that don’t have this, and I’m sitting here feeling ungrateful because I want to buy more things. I think that’s why it’s humbling because, wow, I am so privileged to have all these things that I buy for myself, and other people don’t have that privilege. I feel like in the moment when I’m out shopping with my mom or shopping online I don’t always take that moment to be like, wow I’m so grateful to be doing this.

Q. How much of your closet would you say you actually use?

A. I’ve been doing this thing this year that I saw on TikTok, where I start the year with my hangers backward, so then when I use a piece of clothing, I then put it back where it is facing forwards. I’ve noticed that I do use most of my clothes, but the clothes I don’t lean towards are more going out or other things I’ve had for a while and I need to sell... I just have so much stuff where it’s just like, why did I even buy that, I wore that one time and I’m never going to wear that again. So definitely having my hangers backwards has shown me there’s a lot of things that I could get rid of or wear more.

Q. Do you think fast fashion brands, like Amazon or Shein, are contributing to a loss of individuality?

A. Oh, 1000%. I would definitely say that a lot of my style comes from me seeing it on other people. It’s not me trying

Q & A



Photo contributed by Morgan Strong

Junior Morgan Strong describes her experiences with shopping in the age of mass consumerism, detailing the impact the Internet has had on fashion individuality and spending habits.

new things, it’s me seeing other people. I do have my own style in a way, but it’s like I get my own style from other people and seeing what they’re wearing. It’s just so easy with the click of a button.

Q. How do you think social media has impacted the accessibility and frequency of shopping?

A. Honestly, I think that social media has definitely made an impact on me personally because it’s so easy to just go and scroll and see what everyone else is buying and what everyone is wearing. I also think that in the past year and a half the uprise of influencers and micro-influencers receiving PR and showing everything they are getting just shows you ‘wow, I want to do this’ and it just makes so many people want to be influencers. That just gives brands so many opportunities to send their stuff out and people will just buy it. When I’m scrolling and see that something is from TikTok shop, I’m like, wow, that’s so cool. I’m such an easy person where I just click it and buy it because they made it look so cool. It’s wild to me because it’s just so easy, and all these trends go so fast. They go so fast and then they just end up in landfill and it is just horrible. You see all these things on shelves that would have been so popular six months ago, but now it’s just nothing.

Q. Are there any things you want to do or do more of to be a mindful consumer?

A. Definitely limiting myself with not only buying things but also whenever I clean out my closet, I always like to do it in mass amounts. I do it once a year and I just get a bunch of stuff. I think I need to start doing that in small amounts so that I’m not being as wasteful.

FUELING THE FIRE

The effects of fast fashion on shopping addictions and the environment

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While scrolling through TikTok, you come across a clothing haul video. An influencer has gone viral for showing a clothing haul of the latest trending clothing, ranging from that butter yellow sweatshirt to a polka dot patterned top. Later, an ad comes across your feed promoting other similar clothing items, encouraging you and other viewers to keep up with the quickly changing trends, fueling fast fashion.

Fast fashion is a business model that focuses on rapidly producing clothing items inspired by recent runway trends and putting them on the market in stores or online as fast as possible. The goal is to produce and sell these trendy clothes before the next cycle of trends rolls around to repeat the process again. Fast fashion also refers to cheap, low-quality clothing items. Brands like Zara, H&M, and Shein are all well-known fast fashion companies.

Shopping can be addictive, and fast fashion can fuel it. According to a study from MIT, Stanford, and Carnegie Mellon, researchers found that when someone sees something that they want to buy, the pleasure center of the brain activates. In addition, getting the item at a lower price maximizes the sense of pleasure in the brain. This can influence people to buy more and more clothes.

Social media also plays a role. Many fast fashion brands use social media to show their products with ads and limited-time deals. Consumers are constantly exposed to these new trends, making it easier for the consumer to buy their product. Influencers also promote products that make the viewers feel that they should have that same clothing item to fit in or stay in style.

However, since these clothing items are cheaply made and may only be trending for a short time, these pieces are often discarded after only being worn a few times. Earth.org states, “Many items are worn only seven to ten times before being tossed.”

Due to this cycle of quickly buying and discarding clothes, fast fashion has led to negative consequences on the environment.

Around 92 million tons of textile waste are produced every year. In order to meet the high demand for clothing, the industry uses large amounts of energy. According to the UN Environment Programme, the fast fashion industry is responsible for about 10% of global carbon emissions. This is more than maritime shipping and all international flights combined.

In addition, the fast fashion industry is extremely resource-intensive and is the second-largest consumer of water. Every year, around 93 billion cubic meters of water are used by the fashion industry. Not only does it require large amounts of water, but the industry is also one of the top polluters of water due to the dyeing processes of textiles. The excess water is released into rivers, streams, and ditches.

The materials used to create these low-quality clothing items are usually synthetic fibers like polyester and nylon. These fibers can take hundreds of years to biodegrade.

“Synthetic fibres like polyester and nylon can take between 20 and 200 years to decompose. So, say you buy a dress in your senior year, and you’re 18, it would still exist on the planet by the time you are 40 and could be longer,” AP Environmental Science teacher Jessica Young said.

Overconsumption is a problem and is affecting the entire world. It is estimated that there are enough clothes in the world to clothe the next six generations. The constant buy-and-dispose cycle is filling landfills with clothes.

“There are people who buy from fast fashion brands with the intent of donating their clothes to a thrift store whenever they don’t want them anymore, but only around 10% of clothes that are donated actually end up in stores to be purchased. The rest are adding to the landfill,” Young said.

In order to reduce fast fashion impacts, there are many initiatives being taken and steps that everyone can take to help.

The United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion is an initiative that is committed to reaching Sustainable Development Goals by creating projects and policies that work to reduce social and environmental impacts.

When buying clothing, consumers may check out different options like local thrift stores to extend the lifespan of clothes to reduce waste. For buying new clothes, people can choose sustainable brands and materials like organic cotton and linen that will last a long time.

Fast fashion has reshaped how people consume clothing. This comes at a high cost to the environment and contributes to a cycle of overconsumption and waste. More awareness of our purchasing habits and where we buy clothes from can contribute to efforts to reduce these harmful impacts of fashion and make progress toward a more sustainable future.

A GUIDE TO CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM

SECONDHAND SHOPPING

Examples of this could include thrifting, online marketplaces, and companies focused on reselling certain goods.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Buying a few pieces that are more durable and long-lasting rather than the cheapest variety prevents clothing waste.

B LAB LABEL

The nonprofit organization B Lab provides labels for items that meet a high level of environmental standards.