

## Shopping and shoplifting

A seemingly innocuous addiction, shopping addiction can cause financial and spiritual ruin.

The essence of a shopping addiction is an attempt to purchase a new sense of self in the act of acquiring the new outfit, the new car, the new gadget; in displacing difficult emotions through the thrill and intent of purchase or acquisition. But in all circumstances, this artificially-created sense of worth is short-lived, and almost always quickly followed by a profound sense of guilt or anxiety. Its companion disorder, compulsive shoplifting, often involves items of little or no value to the shoplifter. In addition to guilt and anxiety, and the conflict of wanting but not deserving, it carries the additional components of public humiliation and a criminal record.

The shopping addict will frequently buy on a whim, often without appropriate funds, and will feel to ashamed to take the item back. They will probably have wardrobes full of clothes that they have never worn, shoes, accessories, make up, electrical goods – all bought with the intention of altering how they feel or the sense of who they are. The compulsive shoplifter frequently also shoplifts on impulse for items of little value to the shoplifter or which s/he easily could have purchased.

The shopping addict reinforces their low self-esteem by looking outside of themselves for the answers, a pattern that is socially reinforced as we are told over and again that shopping will make us happy – ‘retail therapy’. Often accompanied by an adrenal high, the initial experience validates this thinking, until the mood subsides into a guilty, embarrassed low where the shopping addict will try to minimise their expenditure and shopping experience. Also seeking the momentary adrenaline rush, the compulsive shoplifter may seek to be found out and punished to validate the self-sense of worthlessness.

Usually beginning in the late teens and early adulthood, shopping addiction and compulsive shoplifting often co-occurs with other disorders, including mood and anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders, other impulse control disorders, and personality disorders.

**If you think you suffering with excessive shopping or shoplifting then give us a call, we can help**

**Call 020 7323 4970**

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