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THE SOCIALIZATION OF COMPULSIVE BUYERS: THE ROLES OF FAMILIES AND MASS-MEDIATED SOURCES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Saovanee Tesgim
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Tab Tesgim and Thongbai Tesgim, great role models, for always believing in me and for giving me invaluable opportunities for formal education.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the roles of the upbringing environments and mass-mediated sources in the socialization of compulsive buyers. Its purpose was to find the answers to these research questions: what does it mean to be a compulsive buyer; what kind of role does family play in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers; what kind of role does mass media and advertising play in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers? To answer these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 women respondents who were identified as compulsive buyers and who fit into one of four categories: the Provider, the Striver, the Abused, and the Neglected. Findings of this study showed that regardless of what type of compulsive buyer they are, all informants, because of their upbringing, generally have low self-esteem and feel as if they are not good enough in their own right as a human being. Compulsive buying is used primarily as a means to temporarily escape from, as well as to substitute for, this sense of inadequacy. There was a universal belief among these women that having plenty of material things, being successful and/or socially visible are the prerequisites for being happy. This belief is the meaning they have constructed from their interactions with other people as well as from their exposure to mass media and advertising.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, UNESCO released the following report concerning the criticism of advertising.

> Many social critics have stated that advertising is essentially concerned with exalting the materialistic virtues of consumption by exploiting achievement drives and emulate anxieties, employing tactics of hidden manipulation, playing on emotions, maximizing appeal and minimizing information, trivializing, eliminating objective considerations, contriving illogical situations, and generally reducing men, women, and children to the role of irrational consumer (MacBride, 1980, p. 154).

Although some variation exists, the UNESCO report seems to fairly represent the general criticism of advertising as the social institution of which the main thrust is to socialize us deeply into the materialism world.

In a discussion of mass media effects, it is important to distinguish between the direct and the indirect impact of advertising. As a general rule, the direct impact tends to be short-term and designed to achieve specific persuasion outcomes. The indirect impact of advertising, on the contrary, tends to be long-term, unintended, and usually subtle in nature. The dual nature of the impact of advertising has helped sustain the age-old dispute over the merits of advertising. The main concern of the critics of advertising, as reflected in the UNESCO report, is about the subtle, long-term, unintended impact of advertising. The main concern of the advertising advocates, naturally, is more of the direct rather than the indirect impact of advertising. The general line of argument by advertising advocates goes like this: advertising can help clients increase sales, but, oddly enough, is not capable of making people more materialistic than they already are.

The continuation of the dispute over whether advertising has any impact suggests that we know so little about how advertising works. This is in spite of voluminous information-processing research that addresses the types of advertising stimuli that can increase awareness, memory, or attitudes toward advocated products. This research appears to assume that advertising has impact, for it addresses *how much*, instead of

whether or *how* advertising can affect consumers. For example, given a certain advertising stimuli as an independent variable, how much can the dependent variables such as awareness, likeness, and buying intention be increased? There is a question of logical validity in following this line of research without also looking at how the *process* of how advertising works. That is, there is a hidden assumption of the existence of advertising effects when we rarely know the way in which advertising effects, both direct and indirect, occur.

The need to understand the process of advertising effects, especially the long-term, unintended ones, has never been more pressing. Advertising is the life-blood of every mass medium in America. It is pervasive in every fabric of the society. If the pervasiveness of advertising is thought of as the cause, then there seems to exist negative effects. Among such effects are the personal and social problems of various forms of excessive consumption. Compulsive buying is a form of such excessive consumption, and it could very well be a long-term unintended consequence of advertising. But until we gain a sense of understanding of the process in which advertising works, especially in the long-term and indirect fashion, we will not completely know for sure that compulsive buying is indeed a negative outcome of advertising.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to understand the long-term, unintended impact of advertising within the context of compulsive buyers' experience. In the following section of this chapter, an overview of the problem of compulsive buying is presented. After this discussion, the information concerning this dissertation, including the research questions, brief overview of research perspective, and research objectives are presented.

The Problem of Compulsive Buying

Buying is such an integral part of our lives that it is rarely recognizable when such socially acceptable and economically desirable behavior becomes a problem. Popular slogans such as "Born to Shop," "Shop 'Till You Drop," and "I Shop, Therefore I Am" illustrate how excessive buying has been trivialized into an amusing behavior, rather than a problematic one. In fact, consumption has been referred to as a "religion" for some

Americans (Belk, 1987), and in a survey conducted at the University of Maryland, shopping is a favorite American pastime, second in popularity only to television watching (Robinson, 1989).

The commonplace of excessive buying and spending in the American society is not surprising given the socio-economic environment. To foster the economic growth, buying has been promoted by aggressive marketing strategies and advertising. For the consumer's convenience, there is an abundance of retail stores, mail-order catalogues, telemarketing, home-shopping networks, frequent credit-card solicitation, and ever-expanding credit lines.

The mass media also play the part in glamorizing excessive buying. On *Lifetime* cable television one can even find a game show entitled *Shop 'Till You Drop*, a program in which contestants are to rush around and spend money in an allotted time period (Sharene, 1997). On *The Price Is Right*, a popular game show aired on one of the major network, the contestants are asked to estimate the price of the merchandise. Whether or not it is the show's intention, it is sending the message that shopping and browsing frequently so that the prices of merchandise are well remembered is a desirable behavior. However, regardless of how excessive buying is trivialized and glamorized, it is indeed a problem--not only a personal, but also a social one. Arthur (1992) estimates that 15 million Americans are shopping addicts. These people shop and spend regardless of their financial situation.

Debt is one of the consequences of excessive buying. People are going into debt at an incredible rate without making rational decisions about how and why they are spending money (Morris 1987). Household debt of all types has increased rapidly throughout the 1990s, and the ratio of consumer debt to personal income has risen dramatically over the last several years and is expected to keep rising in the near future (bankinfo.com, 1998). Although part of the household debt is attributable to a mortgage loan, a large sum of the household debt is credit card debt. According to the data from the Consumer Federation of America, credit card debt has more than doubled from 1990 to 1996 (bankinfo.com, 1998). In fact, a survey conducted earlier among baby boomers, who make up 44% of the adult population but who account for 59% of the national

bankruptcies, showed that credit card debt was a major factor in their bankruptcies (Lambert 1993).

Disruption in interpersonal relationships and problems of business management are another example of the consequences of excessive buying (Coleman and Hull-Mast, 1992). In addition to family and close friends, a cast of many others including creditors, landlords, retailers, sales clerks, bank representatives, collection agencies, or even police and lawyers are experiencing severe consequences of individuals' excessive buying and spending.

Excessive buying and spending does not only bring difficulties in finance, relationships, or management problems at the personal level, but also post serious threats to the national economy. In 1991, approximately 720,000 people filed bankruptcy, which was an increase of 150% over 1980 levels (Well, 1991). Recent statistics indicate that this trend is still true in the later part of the decade. Between July 1996 and June 1997, more than 13 million people filed bankruptcy and approximately 900,000 of these bankruptcies were chapter 7 filings[1] (bankinfo.com, 1998).

In *Beyond Our Means*, Malabre (1987) wrote that individuals and society would have to deal with the severe economic consequences of living beyond their financial resources. He asserted that debt is massive and pervasive at all levels -- personal, corporate, and governmental, and that one of the consequences will be that the American standard of living will be considerably lower than what people have come to expect.

Definitional Issues in Compulsive Buying Research

For the purpose of clarification, three definitional issues--labeling the disorder, defining the disorder, and classifying the disorder--are discussed in this section. Before embarking on these issues, it is important to distinguish between normal and pathological

[1] Chapter 7 bankruptcy or "straight bankruptcy" is a type of bankruptcy available to most individuals. It involves liquidation of all assets that are not exempted by state regulations, which vary greatly from state to state. Exempt property may include items such as work-related tools and basic household furnishings, among others. Nonexempt property may be sold by a court-appointed official or turned over to creditors. By filing Chapter 7 bankruptcy, an individual can get rid of unsecured debts (those where creditors have no rights to specific property), and stop foreclosures, repossessions, garnishments, utility shutoffs, and debt collection activities. An individual can file for Chapter 7 only once every six years.

buying, since, unlike drinking, gambling, or drug abusing, buying is a common everyday activity of which negative consequences are not obvious.

Distinction between Normal and Compulsive Buying

Some authors (e.g., Scherhorn, Reisch, & Rabb, 1990) have posed the question whether compulsive buying should be treated as a part of a linear continuum, or represents a qualitative departure from normal consumer behaviors. d'Astous (1990) proposed that compulsive buying should be viewed as an extreme case of a generalized urge to buy. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) held compulsive buying as fundamentally different from even high levels of normal buying urges.

Whether compulsive buying is an extreme form of a generalized urge to buy or a distinctive psychological disorder, it is clear that compulsive buying is not a normal consumer behavior. Valence, d'Astous, and Fortier (1988) distinguished four types of "pathological" consumers. They stated that a compulsive buyer is an individual who simultaneously possesses the characteristics of these four types of pathological consumers. The first type, *the emotional reactive consumer*, is an individual who places an importance on the symbolism of certain goods that give them some compensatory and emotional benefits. The second type, *the impulsive consumer*, is an individual who feels a sudden spontaneous desire to buy, while living in a state of psychological ambivalence with a struggle between the id and the superego. The third type, *the fanatical consumer*, is an individual who is often interested in only one category of goods (e.g., records, books, and clothing) and is consumed by this monomania. This individual is motivated by an enthusiastic and intense devotion. Some of the behaviors can be called compulsive, and motives are most often either hedonistic or linked to collectionism. The fourth type, *the uncontrolled consumer*, is an individual who tries to reduce psychological tension and sees the act of buying as a means to reduce this tension or anxiety. He or she often does not seek the possession of goods but rather a temporary escape from a state of tension.

Labeling the Behavior

In their seminal paper, Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych (1987) used the term "compulsive consumption" to refer to the behavior that is now known as compulsive buying. The behavior seems to have the elements of shopping, buying, and spending, as

Faber et al. (1987) seemed to use the term shopping, spending, and buying interchangeably to describe compulsive consumers' behaviors. Later, the terms such as "uncontrolled buying," "compulsive shopping," and "compulsive buying" have been used to refer to the behavior, but the term "compulsive buying" is most commonly used in the literature.

Some authors are concerned about semantic problems resulting from using the term "compulsive buying" as a generic term to refer to the behavior that might involve more than just buying. Nataraajan and Goff (1992) noted that there are various forms of distinctive marketplace compulsiveness, including compulsive buying, compulsive spending, compulsive shopping, compulsive hoarding, and compulsive collecting. They argued that by using the term "compulsive buying" to refer to these distinctive behaviors, one could mislead research participants, and that would affect the validity of their responses.

This dissertation acknowledges that there are differences in the various forms of marketplace compulsiveness and that the term "compulsive buying" has a semantic problem in conveying the true meaning of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, for the practical purpose of making the topic identifiable to the mainstream literature in this area, the term compulsive buying will be used in this dissertation to refer to the behavior that usually involves shopping and buying—the acts which are closely related. As Nataraajan and Goff (1992) noted: "Although compulsive shopping need not necessarily lead to buying, it often culminates in the purchase of goods," and "Although compulsive buying can occur without any significant shopping activity, the former often follows the latter" (p. 37-38). More importantly, because the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the behavior based entirely on the participants' free expression of their worldviews, not on their response to a limited set of possible responses assigned by the investigator, it is believed that using the term "compulsive buying" to discuss the problem will not mar the validity of the findings.

Classifying the Behavior

At present, researchers have not agreed on which type of psychological disorders compulsive buying belongs. Some argue that compulsive buying is an addiction; others

view it as an obsessive-compulsive disorder, but many have come to view compulsive buying as an impulse-control disorder.

Marks (1990) noted that compulsive buying shares many features with those of substance dependence. He listed seven features that were common to compulsive buying and other addictions: 1) an urge to engage in a counterproductive behavioral sequence; 2) mounting tension unless the sequence is completed; 3) rapid but temporary reduction of tension after completion of sequence; 4) return of the urge and tension over hours, days, or weeks; 5) external cues unique to a given addiction syndrome; 6) secondary conditioning by external and internal cues such as boredom; and 7) hedonic tone in early stage of addiction. Like Marks, Scherhorn (1990) viewed compulsive buying as an addiction. Nataraajan and Goff (1991) shared Scherhorn's view but noted that compulsive buying also has some features of obsessive-compulsive disorders.

Faber (1992), who had previously viewed compulsive buying as an obsessive-compulsive disorder (Faber, O'Guinn, & Krych, 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), came to view compulsive buying as a form of impulse-control disorder. Faber's view (1992) has received support from some psychiatrists investigating the topic. McElroy, Keck, Pope, Smith, and Strakowski (1994) proposed that compulsive buying, along with kleptomania and binge eating, is an impulse-control disorder that belongs to an extended family of compulsive-impulsive spectrum disorders. As in other impulse-control disorders, McElroy et al. (1994) observed that the patients with compulsive buying experienced repetitive, irresistible, and overpowering urges to buy items as well as uncontrollable needs and mounting tension that can only be released by buying. The tension, temporarily assuaged by the purchase, is quickly replaced by a feeling of guilt. Like kleptomania, which is a known impulse-control disorder, McElroy et al. noted that compulsive buying seems to be a secret disorder masked in shame and guilt.

Nevertheless, some researchers have found that compulsive buying shares features of both obsessive-compulsive disorders and impulse-control disorders. According to a study of 24 compulsive buyers by Christenson et al. (1994), two-thirds of the participants described the urges to buy as intrusive and the buying itself as repetitive, suggesting that they are obsessed with buying. However, some evidence suggests that

compulsive buying may instead be an impulse-control disorder, as some participants said buying could ease their negative feelings rather than create positive ones. Although researchers hold different ideas about how to classify compulsive buying, the findings reported by different research teams have been strikingly similar (Faber 1992).

Defining the Behavior

To clarify what the term "compulsive buying " means in this dissertation, this section traces the ways in which the behavior have been defined in the compulsive buying literature. Since the way compulsive buying is defined has been based on the definitions of compulsion, it may be useful to look at how the term "compulsion" has been defined. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1985), compulsions are "repetitive and seemingly purposeful behaviors that are performed according to certain rules or in a stereotyped fashion" (p. 234). The APA's definition states that compulsions are the behaviors that are premeditated and performed in a repetitive manner, but it does not specify that compulsions are always pathological.

Insel (1990) noted that compulsions could be viewed both in light of pathological problems and "normal" experiences. He listed three types of compulsions that are pathological: obsession with contamination, obsession with doubts, and pure obsession. The patients with contamination obsession worry about having an infection or disease that requires ritualistic grooming. The patients who are obsessed with doubts have such rituals as checking and hoarding. These rituals serve as a means to prevent the anxiety that might occur if a particular event were to take place. The patients with pure obsession have intrusive urges or thoughts, often of an aggressive or sexual nature and their compulsions may be present as cognitive ritual to neutralize the thought they find so horrific. Insel (1990) noted that although most individuals may have intrusive, senseless thoughts and urges that obsessive-compulsive patients have, they are not disabled by these thoughts or behaviors. Based on Insel's argument, individuals can experience compulsions in their normal life.

In a model that explains compulsions, Insel (1990) argued that compulsions are driven by a heightened sense of guilt and anxiety, which are the consequences of uncertainty and the expectation of negative consequences. The distressful feelings of

guilt and anxiety can be coped with in a number of ways: by religious endeavors, by work, and by obsessions with certain thoughts and compulsions to perform certain behaviors.

Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych (1987) adopted the concept of compulsions to the way they defined compulsive buying. As noted, these authors used the term "compulsive consumption" to refer to the behavior that generally means uncontrolled buying, uncontrolled shopping, or uncontrolled spending. They defined compulsive consumption as the following: "A type of consumer behavior which is inappropriate, typically excessive, and clearly disruptive to the lives of individuals who appear impulsively driven to consume" (Faber, O'Guinn, & Krych, 1987, p. 132). It is noteworthy that Faber et al. (1987) defined compulsive consumption in a rather broad manner. Given their definition, one could conceivably include other unrelated dysfunctional behaviors such as alcohol or drug abuses into what they referred to as compulsive consumption.

In a follow-up paper, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) replaced the term "compulsive consumption" with the term "compulsive buying" to refer to the behavior that obviously involves excessive buying, spending, and shopping. However, the definition that they gave to the term compulsive buying is not any more specific than the one that they gave to the term compulsive consumption (Faber et al, 1987). Here, O'Guinn and Faber described compulsive buying as the following: " A response to an uncontrollable drive or desire to obtain, use, or experience a feeling, substance, or activity that leads an individual to repetitively engage in a behavior that will ultimately cause harm to the individual and/ or to others "(p. 148). Although the definitions of compulsive buying that have been given by Faber and O'Guinn are rather broad, they are useful in reminding us that the term "compulsive buying" is used as a representative term and that it involves not only buying, but also other related behaviors such as spending and shopping.

A more specific definition of compulsive buying was given by d'Astous and Bellemare (1989). They defined compulsive buying as the following: "An uncontrollable urge to buy which is impelled by a psychological tension arising from internal factors and which is accompanied by a feeling of relief along with the frustration caused by the addictive nature of the behavior" (p. 82).

Besides being more specific, d'Astous and Bellemare's definition is different from those of Faber and O'Guinn in that it seems to capture the essential symptoms unique to compulsive buying, and these symptoms are the uncontrollable urges that repeatedly compel a person to buy, the temporary relief of psychological tension after buying, and the feelings of frustration from succumbing to the urges.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions in this study:

1. What is the role of primary socialization agents in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

2. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and primary socialization agents (e.g. family, school, and peer) in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

3. What is the role of the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

4. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of empirical and theoretical literature that guides research questions and methodological direction for this dissertation. The chapter comprises two sections. The first section is a review of empirical research on compulsive buying, consumer socialization, and advertising effects; the second section is an overview of theoretical literature that guides the research method.

The review of research on compulsive buying in the first section provides the demographic, psychological, and behavioral descriptions of compulsive buyers. After this, a discussion of theoretical framework for research on compulsive buying is presented. The purpose of the discussion is to point out that it is crucial to explore the sociological dimension of the causes of compulsive buying if we are to explain how an individual becomes a compulsive buyer.

Also included in the first section is a brief review of literature on consumer socialization and advertising effects. The purpose of the review is to show that there is much need to explore the long-term effect of advertising in its role as an agent of consumer socialization. Such exploration is particularly crucial, given the existence of compulsive buying problem--the problem that might just be a negative consequence of consumer socialization via advertising.

The review of theoretical literature in the second section of this chapter involves the paradigmatic issues in mass media effects research and the theoretical perspectives of Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism. The purpose of the discussion is to show that symbolic interactionism, instead of the traditional social scientific approach, is appropriate as a methodological framework for a study that deals with long-term effects of advertising

Empirical Literature on Compulsive Buying

Very few researchers have assessed the prevalence of uncontrolled buying in the general population, and research has not yielded any definite conclusion about the

prevalence of compulsive buying in the United States. Faber and O'Guinn (1992), using the Compulsive Buying Scale, estimated that 1.8 to 8.1% of people in the United States had problems with uncontrolled buying. The two figures were different because of the looseness of the criteria accepted for classifying someone as a compulsive buyer.

Demographic Description of Compulsive Buyers

Gender

Research has shown that compulsive buyers tend to be women rather than men. In the early discussions on the topic of uncontrolled buying, which was then referred to as "oniomania," Kraepelin (1915) and Bleuler (1924) observed that it was almost always women who had problems with uncontrolled buying.

In more recent literature, several teams of researchers have found evidence that is consistent with Kraepelin and Bleuler's observations. Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych (1987) reported a study that increased much awareness among scholars as well as the public about the problem of uncontrolled buying. The findings reported in their seminal study were based on a series of in-depth interviews with 23 self-identified compulsive buyers, recruited from a self-help program based in San Francisco. Their report regarding the gender of the participants indicated that 18 (82.6 %) of the participants were women. Perhaps Faber et al. did not use a systematic sampling method in recruiting these participants; the researchers warned that one should not simply conclude that women were more susceptible than men to uncontrolled buying. They noted that although the proportions of men and women who inquired about compulsive spending at the self-help program were about the same, women were more willing to enter therapy. One of the reasons, they argued, was that women were more inclined to talk about their problem and to follow-up.

Although it was not clear whether because women were more inclined to shop compulsively or because women were more likely to discuss their problem, women constituted the majority of the participants in follow-up studies. In their study reported in 1989, O'Guinn and Faber drew the stratified systematic samples of 808 people who wrote to a self-help program in San Francisco about their uncontrolled buying. They

found that 92% of 386 people who returned the questionnaires (with a response rate of 47.8%) were women.

Few studies in which participants were drawn more systematically from the general population also suggested that women were more susceptible than men to uncontrolled buying. Schlosser, Black, Repertinger, and Freet (1994) recruited people to participate in their study by posting advertisements in a hospital newsletter and a local newspaper. Schlosser et al. then screened these tentative participants with the Compulsive Buying Scale constructed by Faber and O'Guinn (1992) and found 37 people qualified as compulsive buyers. Their report showed that women comprised 80.4% of these 37 people. In another study in which the similar recruitment technique and the same screening instrument were used, Christenson et al. (1994) found that women comprised 91.7% of a total of 22 participants.

d'Astous (1990) used a different approach to support the notion that women were more susceptible than men to uncontrolled buying. Instead of counting the percentage of male and female proportions of participants, who would be classified as compulsive buyers, d'Astous assessed the compulsive buying tendency in normal consumers. Using a 13-item scale that measured individuals' compulsive buying tendency, he found that women scored higher than men on the scale, and the difference was statistically significant.

Age

Three types of information about participants' ages were involved when researchers described participants in studies on compulsive buying. These were the ages when participants were involved in the studies, the ages when the onset of compulsive buying occurred, and the ages when participants realized that they had a problem with their uncontrolled buying. In the earlier studies, researchers often reported only the ages when participants were involved in the study. In later studies reported in psychiatric literature, researchers generally reported the ages of the onset of compulsive buying and the ages of problem realization. According to the studies reported in psychiatric journals, individuals' onset of compulsive buying generally developed in the late teenage years,

but it often took a decade or more before the persons realized the magnitude of their problem.

In their seminal study, Faber et al. (1987) reported that the majority (78.2%) of 23 participants, who identified themselves as compulsive buyers, were in their 30s and 40s. This figure was consistent with a follow-up study in which O'Guinn and Faber (1989) conducted a large-scale mail survey to people solicited from a self-help program for problem buyers. O'Guinn and Faber reported that the mean age of the participants was 37 years. Follow-up studies reported in psychiatric journals showed that the participants, who were classified according to the CBS scale (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992) as compulsive buyers, were generally in age range of 30 to 50 years. For example, in a study conducted by Christenson et al. (1994), the mean age of the participants was 36.4 years. In another study that used similar recruitment technique, Schlosser et al. (1994) reported that the participants' mean age was 30.7 years. The researchers noted that the participants were recruited from a mid-sized college town and that such recruitment location might explain why the participants' mean age was slightly lower than the mean ages reported in the other studies.

Studies reported in psychiatric journals generally included the information about the participants' age of the onset of compulsive buying and the participants' age of the realization of the problem. In a study that involved 24 participants who were classified as compulsive buyers, Christenson et al. (1994) reported that the mean age at the onset of compulsive buying was 17.5 years and the mean age of realization of the problem was 29.5 years. These figures were consistent with those reported in another study conducted by Schlosser et al. (1994). According to Schlosser et al., 46 participants, who were classified as compulsive buyers, had a mean age at the onset of compulsive buying of 18.7 years and the mean age of realization of the problem of 24.9 years.

Besides providing the age description of people engaging in compulsive buying, some researchers have used different approaches in attempting to understand the role of age in compulsive buying. One such approach has been to compare the mean age of people identified as compulsive buyers with that of the general consumers. For example, in the mail-survey in which compulsive buyers were compared with general consumers,

O'Guinn and Faber (1989) found that compulsive buyers were younger than normal consumers, and this difference was statistically significant. The other approach has been to correlate individuals' ages with their compulsive buying tendency. For example, in a study in which 190 general consumers' compulsive buying tendencies were measured, d'Astous (1990) found that age was negatively correlated with compulsive buying tendencies. d'Astous' findings, along with those reported by O'Guinn and Faber, suggest that compulsive buying tends to associate with younger age.

Income

Research has suggested that people from any income level can engage in compulsive buying. In their landmark study, Faber et al. (1987) reported that annual household income varied greatly among 23 participants. The researchers reported the annual household income ranged from $10,000 a year to over $100,000 a year. The majority of the participants, however, had annual household income of between $20,000 and $50,000. In a study in which 46 participants were recruited from a mid-sized college town, Schlosser et al. (1994) reported the range of annual household income between $1500 and $60,000. The participants' mean income was $23,000. In a study that compared 24 participants identified as compulsive buyers with 24 general consumers, Christenson et al. (1994) found that there was a difference between compulsive buyers' median annual household income ($40,000) and that of the general consumers ($26,000). This difference, however, was not statistically significant.

Marital Status

Research has not shown that people with a certain marital status are more or less susceptible than those with the other marital statuses to experience uncontrolled buying. Faber et al. (1987) reported in their landmark study that 47.8% of 23 the participants were married, 30.4% were single, and 21.7% were divorced or separated. Schlosser et al. (1994) reported in another study that 33% of 46 participants were married, 57% were single, and 11% were divorced or widowed. In another study in which participants identified as compulsive buyers were compared with general consumers, Christenson et al. (1994) did not find any statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of their marital status.

Education

Research has not indicated that individuals' level of formal education is associated with their inclination toward uncontrolled buying. Christenson et al. (1994) compared 23 participants identified as compulsive buyers with the participants identified as noncompulsive buyers. The researchers found no statistically significant difference between the two groups regarding the number of years of formal education. In another study, Schlosser et al. (1994) noted that the majority (91.3%) of the participants had a college education. These participants, however, were recruited from a college town.

Occupation

Most studies on compulsive buying do not report participants' occupations. Few studies that do so have suggested that people who engage in compulsive buying are not necessarily limited to certain occupations. Schlosser et al. (1994), for example, reported that compulsive buyers in their study had a variety of occupations such as students, clerks, maintenance workers, nurses, secretarial workers, cooks, research assistants, therapists, bartenders, and teachers.

Race

The issue of racial differences in individuals with compulsive buying has received only limited treatment in existing literature. Studies on compulsive buying have been primarily conducted among Caucasians. In the United States, only one study has included the participants who were African Americans. From that study, Christenson et al. (1994) reported that there was no statistical difference in terms of race between compulsive and noncompulsive buyers.

Psychological Description of Compulsive Buyers

Self-Esteem

Research has shown that having low sense of self-worth is the signature psychological makeup of a typical compulsive buyer. In a study that compared self-identified compulsive buyers with general consumers, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) found that compulsive buyers had significantly lower self-esteem than the general sample. Based on the qualitative data, compulsive buyers viewed themselves as being bad, guilty, unattractive, and inferior to their siblings

More important, having low self-esteem is perhaps one of root causes of compulsive buying. In the seminal study by Faber et al. (1987), several self-identified compulsive buyers admitted using buying as a means to cope with stress, depression, and unpleasant life situations. According to O'Guinn and Faber (1989), the attention from interpersonal relationships and self-esteem motivation was the true motivation of buying. They noted that the items most commonly purchased by compulsive buyers were clothing, cosmetics, and gift. These products, they noted, offered compulsive buyers social benefits, which could be the attention, appreciation, or approval they sought from others.

Obsessive-Compulsive Trait

Research has suggested that compulsive buyers have obsession and compulsion as part of their trait and that is not uncommon for their obsession and compulsion to manifest in other activities. A phenomenology study by O'Guinn and Faber (1989) showed that compulsive buyers scored higher than general consumers on a scale that measured their trait compulsivity. The trait compulsivity of the two groups was measured using a five-item scale taken from the obsessive-compulsive syndrome scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The five-item scale, according to the researchers, was an indicative of the presence of related personality characteristics common among compulsive disorders, which included abnormal fears, worrying, difficulties in concentrating, guilt feelings, and self-debasing feelings and attitudes. The participants' comments also indicated that some compulsive buyers had problems with other forms of compulsive behavior, including substance abuse, excessive work, exercise, and sex.

Behavioral Description of Compulsive Buying

Clinical Symptoms

A few studies have provided accounts of what compulsive buyers actually experience during a typical course of uncontrolled buying. In these studies, researchers have described what compulsive buyers experienced in terms of the buying urges, the lack of power to overcome these urges, the unplanned nature of buying, and the reactions toward the buying that has been made.

Based on the interviews with 23 self-identified compulsive buyers, Faber et al. (1987) provided a general description of compulsive buyers' experiences. According to Faber et al., many participants in the study reported that that they felt out of control in regards to their buying, just as the addicts were dependent on drugs. The participants described being driven by an ego-alien force to buy something they did not need and often never got around to using. Buying had become something they had to do to alleviate their anxiety. Although buying brought gratification for most participants, such elevated feelings were short-lived. Their inability to resist the buying urges generally led to the feelings of frustration, remorse, anxiety, and fear of being found out about their lifestyles.

Faber et al. (1987) noted that it was the reaction to buying that distinguished compulsive buyers from other shoppers. The researchers viewed compulsive buyers' experiences as consistent with the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1980), a behavior was said to be obsessive-compulsive when it was inconsonant with the immediate wish of the individual, invaded consciousness, and was experienced as senseless and repugnant. They argued that the feeling of being out of control and the mix of emotions associated with buying were the indications that compulsive buying was a form of obsessive-compulsive disorders.

A detailed description of the compulsive buyers' experiences during a course of uncontrolled buying was provided by Christenson et al. (1994). The researchers reported that the participants, who had been classified according to the Compulsive Buying Scale (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992) as compulsive buyers, reported the experience of irresistible urges and mounting tension that could be relieved only by buying. The participants reported that almost half (46.7%) of all their buying experiences were associated with these feelings. Almost half (45%) of the participants described all the thoughts of buying as intrusive.

Christenson et al. (1994) noted that most participants did attempt to resist the urge to buy. Such attempts, however, were often overcome by the urge. Almost all (91.3%) of the participants reported that they had tried to resist the urge to buy. These

participants reported that they had tried almost half (43.2%) of the time they experienced the buying urge. Nevertheless, they found themselves yielding to these urges almost three fourths (74.3%) of the time they experienced them. Christenson et al. (1994) noted that buying as a result of compelling urges which compulsive buyers experienced was usually unplanned. According to the researchers, two thirds of the participants reported that the duration between the desire for shopping and the actual buying act was much shorter than that of the buying they described as "normal." Normal buying, according to these participants, was more planned.

Fluctuation of Moods

Research has shown that, unlike general consumers, compulsive buyers generally experience mixed emotional feelings associated with buying. The way in which compulsive buyers' moods fluctuates has been reported in several studies. According to Faber et al. (1987), the self-identified compulsive buyers who participated in the study reported a mixture of positive and negative feelings during a typical course of compulsive buying. In another study in which compulsive buyers were compared with general consumers, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) found that compulsive buyers reported a greater emotional lift associated with the buying process than did the participants who were not compulsive buyers. The difference in the emotional lift reported by the two groups was statistically significant.

In follow-up studies, researchers have paid significant attention to studying the role of moods in compulsive buying. Three studies have dealt specifically with the types of moods experienced by compulsive buyers during a typical buying episode. Consistent with preliminary findings reported by Faber et al. (1987), Christenson et al. (1994) noted that it was typical for compulsive buyers to experience short-term gratification and mixed emotions after the purchases were made. Nearly all (95.8%) of 23 compulsive buyers in their study reported some positive feelings such as release of tension and depression, pride, and happiness. They associated 79% of all their purchases to these positive feelings. However, a combination of negative emotions such as guilt, anger, sadness, and indifference developed shortly after the experience of positive feelings.

In 1996, Faber and Christenson conducted a follow-up study on what O'Guinn and Faber had reported in 1989 about compulsive buyers' experience of emotional lift associated with buying process. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand the way in which compulsive buyers' moods fluctuated during a shopping episode as compared to those of general consumers. They compared 24 compulsive buyers, of which two were male, with general consumers in terms of the moods experienced prior to, during, and after a shopping trip. Consistent with O'Guinn and Faber's report in 1989, Faber and Christenson found that compulsive buyers more frequently experienced extreme moods, which could be positive or negative, while shopping than did the comparison group. It was also found that compulsive buyers were more likely than the comparison group to experience negative moods prior to shopping. When within-subject differences were examined for the moods experienced before and after shopping, it was found that compulsive buyers were more likely to move from negative to positive moods, whereas the opposite was true for the comparison group.

Consistent with Faber and Christenson's findings, Schlosser et al. (1994) found that although positive moods could trigger the urges to go buy something, it was more common for compulsive buyers to experience negative moods before shopping trips. According to Schlosser et al., sadness, irritability, and loneliness were the most common moods that triggered the urges.

Duration and Frequency

Research has shown that although compulsive buyers do not engage in buying everyday, they are obsessed with the urges to buy on a daily basis, and at least an hour is spent everyday dealing with such urges. Schlosser et al. (1994) reported that, on average, compulsive buyers who participated in the study had 12.9 buying episodes per month. Some participants had as many as 60 buying episodes per month. In another study, Christenson et al. (1994), found that buying urges generally occurred every few days to once a week, although some participants reported episodes arising as frequently as every hour or as infrequently as once a month. An average of 7.8 hours per week was occupied with the urges to buy. Buying urges generally lasted 1 hour.

Settings

Research has suggested that some environmental factors, which could be occasions, time of the day, availability of financial resources and credit, and promotional messages, can trigger compulsive buyers' urges to buy. Christenson et al. (1994) found that compulsive buyers' shopping episodes were frequent but not limited to special holidays. In another study, Schlosser et al. (1994) found that buying urges were most likely to occur during the Christmas holiday than any other holidays. Special occasions such as a one's birthday or a friend's birthday could also trigger compulsive buyers' urges to buy (Christenson et al., 1994; Schlosser et al., 1994).

In regard to the time of the day, Schlosser et al. (1994) reported that buying urges were most likely to erupt during the afternoon and less likely in the morning. And according to Christenson et al. (1994), these urges most commonly arose at home, but were also experienced at work, in the store, in the mall, and while driving.

According to McElroy et al. (1994), most participants who were patients diagnosed for uncontrolled buying reported that having access to credit cards, money, shopping catalogs, or home shopping television programs triggered or increased their compulsive buying.

Nature of the Symptoms: Chronic vs. Episodic

Research has shown that, unlike general consumers, compulsive buyers are more likely to engage in buying binges. According to Faber and O'Guinn (1988), when 129 self-identified compulsive buyers were compared with their normal counterparts, it was found that compulsive buyers were significantly more likely to engage in buying binges. The participants, who were general consumers, reported that they rarely went on a buying binge or were unable to stop shopping or felt anxious when they did not go shopping.

A study reported in psychiatric literature has revealed that the uncontrollable urges to buy experienced by compulsive buyers can be either chronic or episodic. Christenson et al. (1994) reported that more than half (59.3%) of the participants who were compulsive buyers viewed their buying urges as chronic, with few periods of remission. The rest (41.7%) of the participants viewed their buying urges as episodic, with periods of abstinence that lasted from 2 months to several years.

Comorbidity of Compulsive Buying

A current trend in studying consumption disorders is to view various forms of disorders as the manifestations of similar psychological problems. This view suggests that people who have one disorder may be at much higher risk for developing related disorders. In psychiatric terms this is referred to as comorbidity. The topic of comorbidity of compulsive buying has been more prevalent in psychiatric literature than in consumer behavior literature. So far, research has shown that it is not uncommon for compulsive buyers to also experience other psychological disorders. The most common comorbidity diagnoses among compulsive buyers reported by the researchers have been anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and binge-eating disorder.

In a study in which compulsive buyers were compared with noncompulsive buyers, Christenson et al. (1994) found that compulsive buyers were statistically more likely to have lifetime histories of anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and eating disorders. Other psychiatric disorders associated with compulsive buying reported by Christenson et al. were panic disorders, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Consistent with the findings by Christenson et al., Schlosser (1994) reported that more than two-thirds of compulsive buyers participating in the study met criteria for many mental disorders such as anxiety disorder and eating disorders.

Faber, Christenson, Zwaan, and Mitchell (1995) reported two complimentary studies that dealt with the comorbidity of compulsive buying and binge-eating disorder. One study assessed the likelihood of an individual who was diagnosed with binge eating disorder to be identified as a compulsive buyer; the other study assessed the tendency of an individual who was a compulsive buyer to be diagnosed with binge eating. The participants in both studies were identified as compulsive buyers based on Faber and O'Guinn's Compulsive Buying Scale (1992). For the first study, Faber et al. (1995) found that the participants who were diagnosed with binge eating disorder scored significantly higher on the Compulsive Buying Scale than non-binge eaters of similar weight. For the other study, the researchers found that compulsive buyers were significantly more likely than noncompulsive buyers to be diagnosed with an eating disorder or to engage in binge eating.

Compulsive Buyers' Shopping Behaviors

Shopping Objectives

Research has shown that compulsive buyers do not always buy when they shop. McElroy et al. (1994) reported in a psychiatric journal that some participants, who were diagnosed with compulsive buying, had a problem with their buying because they spent excessive amount of time shopping, even if they did not buy anything.

Compulsive buyers typically, but not always, buy for themselves. Schlosser et al. (1994) found that although most compulsive buyers bought things for themselves, it was not uncommon for them to buy for others. According to Schlosser et al., 61% of compulsive buyers in the study reported that they also shop for family members and friends.

Shopping Channels

According to McElroy et al. (1994), compulsive buyers generally, but not always, shopped at stores. The researchers found that all 20 participants diagnosed with compulsive buying shopped at stores, but some also shopped by catalog and by home shopping programs on television.

Shopping Companions

Research has shown that compulsive buyers generally shop alone. According to Schlosser et al. (1994), 74% of the participants identified as compulsive buyers reported that they shopped by themselves. However, few participants reported that they had shopping companions.

Payment Methods

Research has indicated that the amount of money spent per shopping trip varied across individual compulsive buyers. On average, a compulsive buyer spends approximately $100 for a shopping trip that is driven by a compulsive urge. In a study by Schlosser et al. (1994), the range of money spent by compulsive buyers per shopping trip was $15 to $500, with a mean of $91.50. In another study, Christenson et al. (1994) reported that compulsive buyers spent an average of $109.70 per shopping trip.

Compulsive buyers rely heavily on credit cards as a means of paying for their purchases. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) found that, on average, compulsive buyers owned

significantly more credit cards than general consumers. Consistent with O'Guinn and Faber's finding, McElroy et al. (1994) reported that most patients participating in the study used credit cards to pay for what they bought. Credit cards were so crucial that some compulsive buyers thought that getting rid of the cards would help them control their buying. According to McElroy et al., some patients gave their credit cards to family members to be held or to be destroyed in an attempt to control their spending.

Types of Merchandise

Compulsive buyers generally purchased items that have social benefits rather than utilitarian benefits. Based on the interviews with self-identified compulsive buyers, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) noted that the items most commonly purchased out of compulsivity were clothing, cosmetics, and gifts. O'Guinn and Faber noted that these products offered compulsive buyers social benefits. These social benefits, according to O'Guinn and Faber, could be the attention from others to the way they dressed or the appreciation from significant others in exchange for gifts.

Consistent with O'Guinn and Faber (1989), Christenson et al. (1994) and Schlosser et al. (1994) reported that the products that were associated with physical appearance or attractiveness (e.g., clothing, shoes, and jewelry) were the most frequently purchased items during compulsive buying episodes.

Treatments of Merchandise

Research has shown that compulsive buyers buy things as a means to deal with their psychological problems rather than to obtain things for their functional use. This aspect of compulsive buyers' buying motivation has been reflected in research findings concerning the ways they treat their purchases. It has been reported in many studies that compulsive buyers never get to use many things they buy, and that they have to dispose of these items in different ways. According to Faber et al. (1987), several self-identified compulsive buyers in the study said that they never used the things they had bought. They reported hiding their purchases in the trunk of their car or in a closet for fear of being found out by their spouses. As many as 43.4% of the participants reported that their closets were filled with unopened items.

In another study, Christenson et al. (1994) asked the participants identified as compulsive buyers a number of questions concerning what they did with their purchases. The participants reported that 35.9% of the items purchased during compulsive buying episodes were used minimally or not at all, whereas this was true for only 7.1% of their "normal purchases." The participants reported several ways in which their purchased goods were disposed. The most common ways were returning them to the stores, giving them away, and keeping them in storage.

Consequences of Compulsive Buying

Research has shown that the most common consequences of compulsive buying are financial difficulties, emotional problems, and unstable interpersonal relationships.

Financial Consequence

The financial consequence of compulsive buying is obvious given the large amount of debt reported by compulsive buyers in many studies. For many compulsive buyers, it was a large amount of debt that made them realize that they had the problem (Schlosser et al., 1994). According to Christenson et al. (1994), compulsive buyers owed between $4,974 and $6,519. These figures were close to the amount of debt reported by Schlosser et al. (1994) in another study. Schlosser et al. reported that, on average, compulsive buyers carried a debt of $5400.

Studies have shown that compulsive buyers carry higher debt load than general consumers. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) reported that, on average, compulsive buyers paid 46% of their earning each month for all the debts, while general consumers paid 22%. The difference was statistically significant. In another study, Christenson et al. (1994) reported that each month compulsive buyers paid an average of 50% of household income for debts incurred from compulsive buying.

As noted earlier, compulsive buyers rely heavily on credit cards to pay for their purchases. The financial consequences faced by compulsive buyers are reflected in the few studies in which compulsive buying has been found to be associated with irrational credit usage. According to a study in which the compulsive buying behaviors in normal consumers were investigated, d'Astous (1990) found that compulsive buying was correlated with irrational credit card usage and that the correlation was statistically

significant. In another study which involved self-identified compulsive buyers, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) noted that compulsive buyers had significantly more credit cards which were not paid in full each month than general consumers.

Emotional Consequence

Compulsive buyers suffer several emotional problems resulting from their buying behavior. According to O'Guinn and Faber (1989), one common emotional problem compulsive buyers faced was the feeling of guilt associated with their uncontrolled buying. The researchers reported that the participants, who identified themselves as compulsive buyers, expressed a significantly greater level of remorse than general consumers following shopping. Based on the qualitative data given by these participants, O'Guinn and Faber noted that besides the feeling of guilt and shame, compulsive buyers were faced with the feeling of frustration of not being able to control their behavior. They also felt alienated for believing that their behavior was so abnormal that they had to keep it secret and did not think that they were able to discuss it with anyone.

Consequence in Interpersonal Relationships

Research has suggested that problems in interpersonal relationships as a result of their spending behavior are common among compulsive buyers. Based on the qualitative data, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) noted that disputes over money and threats of separation and divorce were not uncommon in the families of compulsive buyers. Some compulsive buyers reported to the researchers that people close to them had finally given up on them. Consistent with O'Guinn and Faber's findings, McElroy et al. (1994) reported that seven of the 20 compulsive buyers in the study reported that they had family problems (including divorce) as a result of their spending.

A Theoretical Framework for Research on Compulsive Buying

There have been a number of models proposed to explain the causes of addiction. The focus of these models has been either on biological, psychological, or socio-cultural dimension of the causes of addiction. Through the years, the focus had changed from one model to another until researchers began to combine these factors into a kind of "biopsychosocial" model of addiction. (Donovan, 1988) From the biopsychosocial

perspective, one cannot explain the causes of addiction by relying exclusively either on biological, psychological, or socio-cultural factors. An addictive behavior, according to the biopsychosocial approach, is caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. The notion that an addictive behavior is caused by multiple factors has been widely adopted by researchers in the area of substance addictions (e.g., Donovan, 1988; Nathan, 1980).

Faber (1992), who changed his view about compulsive buying from being an obsessive-compulsive disorder to being an impulse-control disorder, applies the biopsychosocial perspective to a theoretical framework for research on the causes of compulsive buying. Faber argues that although biological and psychological factors can explain why an individual has a tendency for impulse-control disorders, it is the socio-cultural factors that explain why that individual has a problem with compulsive buying, instead of alcoholism, bulimia, pathological gambling, or other consumption disorders. To gain a better understanding of Faber's argument, it is important to review Faber's discussion of the theoretical framework for the causes of compulsive buying.

Biological Factors

According to Faber (1992), findings from three areas of research--genetic transmission of disorders, neurotransmission, and chemical intervention, and comorbidity of different disorders--support the assumption that the cause of the disorders has biological components.

Faber (1992) notes that findings from well-known studies on alcoholism (e.g., Collins, 1985; Goodwin, 1984) have suggested that alcoholism is a trait that can be genetically transmitted from generation to generation. According to Faber, researchers have found that sons of Danish alcoholic fathers are four times more likely than other males to eventually become alcoholics, regardless of whether they are raised by their biological parents.

For compulsive buying, the evidence that the disorder can be genetically transmitted is still limited. So far, only one published study conducted by McElroy et al. (1994) has touched on the family history of compulsive buyers, and the findings is far from conclusive. McElroy et al. reported that of 20 compulsive buyers, only 3 had

relatives with compulsive buying, although it was not uncommon for these participants to have relatives with other disorders. According to McElroy et al., 17 participants had one or more first-degree relatives with mood disorder, 11 with alcohol or substance abuse, and three with an anxiety disorder.

Faber (1992) notes that the strongest evidence for a biological cause for addiction and impulse-control disorder comes from studies on neurotransmission and chemical intervention. One prominent theory of addiction is endorphin theory, which states that human beings are driven to increase the production of endorphins naturally or to seek out artificial ways to achieve the same feelings of euphoria (Milkman & Sunderwirth, 1982). According to Milkman and Sunderwirth, sedative drugs as well as certain mood-calming activities, such as watching television, listening to music, are thought to increase the body's levels of endorphins, thus enhancing the feeling of well-being or even euphoria. Faber (1992) argues that compulsive buying may be a way of achieving a change in brain chemistry that is associated with desired increase in neurotransmission.

Findings from a few studies that involve the use of chemical intervention on patients with compulsive buying seem to support the assumption that the cause of compulsive buying has a biological component. In a paper published in 1991, McElroy et al. found that a low level of serotonin, which is an amino acid that helps relay impulses between neurons, correlates to several impulse control disorders. The researcher also found that treatment with drugs that regulate the availability of serotonin appeared to alleviate the disorders in three patients with compulsive buying. In a follow-up study, Black, Monahan, and Gabel (1997) treated ten compulsive buyers with fluvoxamine daily for nine weeks. The researchers found that nine of ten participants were less preoccupied with shopping, spent less time shopping, and reported spending less money.

Faber (1992) argues that the existence of comorbidity, the likelihood of people with one type of disorder to also have other disorder(s), suggests the biological cause of the disorders. Evidences of comorbidity have been reported for many types of disorders, including trichotillomania (Christenson et al., 1991), kleptomania (McElroy et al., 1991), and pathological gambling (Lesieur et al., 1986). In the area of compulsive buying, several teams of researchers (e.g., Christenson et al., 1994; Schlosser et al., 1994; Faber,

Christenson, Zwaan, & Mitchell, 1995) have found clear evidences of comorbidity of compulsive buying and other disorders.

Psychological Factors

In a paper published in 1986, Jacob proposed a general theory of addiction, which includes biological, psychological, and sociological factors to explain why individuals engage in addictive behaviors. For the psychological component of the cause of addiction, Jacob argues that individuals engage in addictive behaviors as a way to fulfill their psychological needs--the needs that stem from ones' lack of a sense of self-worth. Jacob observes that individuals who are susceptible to addictive behaviors are more likely to have experienced earlier in their lives feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Faber (1992) notes that a consistent finding that compulsive buyers have low self-esteem seems to fit Jacob's argument about the psychological dimension of the cause of addictive behaviors. Faber observes that, in many instances, compulsive buyers tend to compare themselves to their siblings, feel that they were treated differently from their siblings by their parents, try to be perfect, and strive to please their parents and others.

From a psychological standpoint, Jacob (1986) argues that behaviors can become problematic if they meet one of the three criteria: provide recognition or acceptance to people with low self-esteem; allow them to act out their anger aggression; and provide an escape through fantasy. Based on Jacob's argument, Faber (1992) notes that buying may be problematic for some people for three reasons. First, buying can be a way of gaining recognition of the self as being a shrewd shopper, an early adopter of technology or a fashion trend. Second, buying provides relief from feelings of low self-esteem by acting out an aggressive drive, getting attention or retaliating against spouses or parents. Finally, buying provides a way of escaping into a fantasy where an individual can experience the feelings of importance or status by associating with the store environment and the feeling of being respected by owning and using credit cards.

Sociological Factors

According to Faber (1992), the meaning assigned by a certain culture to a behavior is a determining factor whether an individual is at risk biologically and psychologically to actually develop an addiction to that behavior. Faber states, "Social or

cultural views of disorders influence the likelihood that a particularly susceptible individual will develop a problem with the behavior" (p. 816).

Researchers have established some evidences of socio-cultural influences on addiction in the area of substance abuses. For example, Greeley et al. (1980) reported a study that dealt with the variation of individuals' drinking habits across three ethnic groups within four major American cities. The ethnic groups included in the study were Jewish, Irish, and Italian. The researchers found that there were differences in drinking habits among these ethnic groups. In the Jewish culture, the religious symbolism associated with drinking, along with strong cultural norms against drunkenness, seems to discourage alcohol consumption. For the Irish, alcohol, which is a vehicle for promotion of fun and pleasure as well as a potent tranquilizer for dissipating grief and tension, helps create a convenient escape and fosters dependency. For Italians, who accept drinking as a natural part of daily life, alcohol is treated almost as food and not singled out for its special pleasures.

In the area of compulsive buying, the discussion of sociological linkage to the cause of the disorder has been limited to theoretical speculation. As an explanation for the rampage of compulsive buying in the United States and other Western countries such as Canada (d'Astous et al., 1990) and Germany (Scherhorn et al., 1990), Faber (1992) noted that people in these societies are equipped with greater financial resources than those in developing countries to afford such excessive buying. Furthermore, according to Faber, the practice of excessive buying is treated in these cultures as a trivial and a humorous matter rather than as a serious problem.

According to Faber's (1992) biopsychosocial perspective of compulsive buying, an individual can inherit through genes a psychological predisposition to engage in dysfunctional behaviors, but the exact behaviors in which such predisposition is manifested will be influenced by the cultural context in which the individual is brought up. Based on Faber's conceptualization, compulsive buying is a manifestation of an individual's in-born compulsiveness, and such manifestation is fostered by the way in which the individual is socialized into a consumer community.

At present, research on compulsive buying has been limited to documenting demographic and psychological descriptions of compulsive buyers, although some advancement has been made to document a behavioral description of compulsive buying. From a biopsychosocial standpoint, much emphasis in the investigation has been on psychological explanations of the disorder. In spite of a plausible explanation of sociological influences on individuals' manifestation of compulsive predisposition in the form of buying, research has not reached the point where the roles of socialization in compulsive buying are empirically investigated. This is understandable, given that compulsive buying is a new area of inquiry.

Nevertheless, there are at least two major pitfalls of focusing the investigation only on the psychological explanations of compulsive buying. First, the empirical evidence that would support the biopsychosocial perspective of the cause of compulsive buying is missing, as much of the existing evidence is confined to the psychological domain. Second, as studies on comorbidity have shown that various dysfunctional behaviors can share similar psychological profiles, one cannot rely only on psychological factors to explain why a person has a problem with compulsive buying rather than engaging in other dysfunctional behaviors. Given that buying is a learned behavior, we will miss the very explanation of why a person becomes a compulsive buyer by not studying the possibility of sociological influences on compulsive buying.

Consumer Socialization

This section discusses four issues regarding consumer socialization. These are the general description of the empirical investigation of consumer socialization, sources of consumer socialization, consumer socialization through mass-mediated sources, and consumer socialization of compulsive buyers.

Empirical Investigation of Consumer Socialization

Consumer socialization is the branch of consumer behavior that deals with how individuals learn to become consumers within a society. Much research in consumer socialization has been the contribution of a small group of researchers. The dominant research perspective has been one of an information-processing paradigm in which

researchers attempt to determine the skills and knowledge important to be good consumers. The dysfunctional aspects of consumer socialization have been under-explored in the consumer socialization literature. This is in spite of the fact that consumer behaviors encompass not only the utilitarian, but also the experiential, fantasy, and mythical aspects of the acquisition and consumption of goods (Belk, Wallendrof, & Sherry, 1989; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Levy, 1986; Rook, 1988) .

The mainstream consumer socialization research investigates the functional outcomes of consumer socialization such as children's understanding of the purpose of television commercials, their concern about product attributes, their ability to distinguish information sources, attitudes and behaviors on saving, and adolescents' knowledge and behaviors at various stages of decision making about purchasing (Atkin, 1982; Moschis, 1985; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1979; Ward, Wackman, & Wartella, 1977). Only a few studies investigate attitudes toward materialism and conspicuous consumption (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Wackman & Wartella, 1977).

Sources of Consumer Socialization

The potential socialization sources are family, peers, school, workplace, church, and the mass media. Apparently, not all of these sources are equally important in consumer socialization. Moschis (1985) found that parents are the most influential source for children to learn utilitarian and functional consumer skills. However, it was also found that most parents did very little to actively teach their children consumer skills (Ward, 1980). Peers are usually found to be influential during adolescence, and they are more the arbitrators of taste and style influencing brand and product preferences than as providers of knowledge or skills (Moschis & Moor, 1979).

Consumer Socialization through Mass-Mediated Sources

Given the pervasiveness of the mass media in general and of advertising in particular, they must certainly be considered one of the most influential of all potential consumer socialization sources. This is especially true in contemporary culture where mass media and advertising are replacing the primary social agents in connecting people in the community (Prensky & Wright-Isak, 1997).

It is important to recognize that when the media present consumers with information it is often coincidental to their major purpose of entertaining. And for advertising, the utmost important concern is to persuade rather than to educate people to be good consumers. Therefore, the outcomes of exposure to the mass media and advertising are unlikely to be only the accumulation of "hard" goal-oriented consumer skills. Instead, it may involve the acquisition of values, orientations, and even dysfunctional behaviors.

Further, it is noteworthy that the mass media are likely to put emphasis on certain types of content that is different from the interpersonal communication. Faber and O'Guinn (1988) called consumer fantasy, terminal materialism, and dissatisfaction with life the potential consequences of mass-mediated consumer socialization. They also noted that the media's greatest function is to "homogenize" people's fantasies. In a study that addresses some less utilitarian outcomes of consumer socialization, Moschis and Churchill (1978) found that the media tend to influence expressive values more than consumer skills. By looking at the impact of TV use on seven different outcome variables, they found that TV appears to become an important component of consumer socialization for the expressive components or consumption values rather than useful consumer skills.

It is also important to recognize that the mass media are likely to operate through different processes than interpersonal sources of socialization. Bandura (1971) argued that learning via the mass media often involves a type of imitative learning, which does not demand reasoned action, or even understanding.

Consumer Socialization of Compulsive Buyers

Few studies in the compulsive buying literature have investigated the sociological aspects of the problem. Faber and O'Guinn (1988) and d'Astous, Maltais, and Roberge (1990) addressed the role of family in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers. d'Astous and Bellemare (1989) addressed the role of advertising appeals in compulsive buyers' attitudes. This section discusses the three studies in detail.

The Roles of Family

In a study of the role of family in the socialization of compulsive buyers, Faber and O'Guinn (1988) found two dimensions of what compulsive buyers tend to experience earlier in their lives. First, compulsive buyers are more likely to be socialized to appear to get along with others, and give in to other people's desires rather than to be up-front about their own opinions. Compulsive buyers reported seeing themselves as trying to live up to their parents' expectations, even though they received little reward or recognition for their obedient behaviors. Second, compulsive buyers are more likely to learn that material things are rewards for good behaviors or the sign of caring. Faber and O'Guinn found that in the families of compulsive buyers' money or gifts were used as rewards with a significantly higher frequency than in other families.

d'Astous, Maltais and Roberge (1990) examined the compulsive buying tendencies of adolescent consumers. They found that young compulsive buyers are influenced by the possessions of their friends. With respect to family influence, they found that young compulsive buyers are likely to have one or both parents with compulsive tendencies.

The Roles of Advertising

In a study that deals with the effects of advertising stimuli on compulsive buyers, d'Astous and Bellemare (1989) hypothesized that compulsive buyers would be more susceptible to the image-appeal persuasion rather than information-appeal persuasion. This hypothesis is based on the previous literature that for compulsive buyers, buying frequently serves as a temporary relief from their generalized sense of low self-worth. For these problem buyers, consumption is a mark of social status, a means to improve their self-perception. Consequently, messages in line with this idea should be preferred over those that merely extol the virtues of products and their attributes.

To test their hypothesis, d'Astous and Bellemare exposed 30 consumers, half of which were screened as compulsive buyers, to six pairs of print ads for consumer products. For each pair of ads, the difference is only the written copy that was either image-oriented or information-oriented. They found that compulsive buyers show greater preferences for ads with image appeal than did the non-compulsive buyers.

d'Astous and Bellemare's findings suggest that compulsive buyers are affected in some way by advertising stimuli. It is interesting when d'Astous and Bellemare's findings are compared with Faber and O'Guinn's (1987) findings that most compulsive buyers in their study did not admit being triggered by advertising to buy. The comparison of the two studies leads to the notion that advertising might affect compulsive buyers, but the way it works to affect them is perhaps so subtle that it is not readily recognizable

It is obvious that d'Astous and Bellemare (1987) follow the information-processing perspective in their experiments of the effects of advertising stimuli on compulsive buyers' attitudes toward the ads. Their focus is on the short-term persuasive effects rather than the long-term socialization effects of exposure to advertising. Given the subtlety of how advertising influences people, it seems that the information-processing approach and the experimental research design might not be an appropriate methodology for the study of the role of advertising in consumer socialization of compulsive buyers.

Mass Media and Advertising Effect

This section discusses three topics regarding advertising effects. These are persuasiveness of mass media and advertising, persuasive power of advertising, and long-term, unintended effects of advertising.

The Persuasiveness of Mass Media and Advertising

Since the turn of the 20th century, mass media have emerged as one of the most pervasive of all potential socialization agents. Moschis (1987) reported that average Americans watch the equivalent of over nine years of television in their lifetime, and that is but one mass medium. Not only is the media and advertising more pervasive, but exposure to these messages can also lead to important changes in people's perception and behavior. This belief comes not only intuition, but from decades of mass media effects research. As Chafee (1956) stated:

> We have no need of further research to assure ourselves that television is, generally speaking, an effective agency of socialization. Exhaustive content

> analyses have detailed the wide range of symbolic themes--economic, political, social and cultural--that are transmitted via commercial television. Dozens of survey have documented the fact that children spend a great deal of time, from a very young age, watching these presentations--a habit that diminishes but rarely vanishes in adulthood. Experiments and longitudinal panel studies alike have produced evidence that much of television's material is learned and integrated in to the developing youngster's personality and social life. (Chafee, 1956, p. 1)

In keeping governmental intervention at bay, the American media enterprises seek financial endorsement from advertisers. Consequently, a great portion of what the audiences are actually exposed to is the many "brief" messages from advertisers. Further, advertising has been more penetrating than ever with the extensive use of direct-mail delivery during the last few decades. Sorting through a bulk of catalogs and direct mail letters has become a daily routine for a great majority of Americans. According to the Direct Marketing Association, from 1987 to 1992, the Americans receive approximately sixty million pieces of direct mail every year (Ossorio, 1994). As Pollay (1986) has remarked, advertising is environmental because of its proliferation and the intrusion of various media into our everyday lives. Given the notion that the media content is largely limited to that of information and entertainment, while advertising is also that of persuasion, the implication for the effects of advertising on people's thoughts and behaviors is by no means minimal.

The communication scholar James W. Carey (1960) noted that advertising is persuasive mainly by providing information. Some advertising content indeed is direct and makes rational appeals, mentioning attributes of the product, its advantages, and price. Much advertising, however, has little to do with information or rational appeals. Instead, it attempts to manipulate consumers using indirect and sophisticated appeals. Belk and Pollay (1985) noted that the luxury themes and appeals have been common in advertising and the trend is toward an increase in the appeals that foster materialism. According to DeFleur and Dennis (1994), a study conducted in 1992 on popular TV commercials has shown that those featuring fantasy themes are more favorable among Americans than those using endorsements.

But exactly in what way does advertising influence people when it receives only little attention from an average audience? Indeed, it has been reported in the *Wall Street*

Journal in 1989 that "TV exposure has very minimal effect...difficult to find at all," and that "TV advertising wasn't even effective over the long run..." (Stewart 1992). Krugman (1984) provided perhaps one of the most elaborate conceptualization of how advertising might affect consumers, in spite of their low-involvement when exposed to advertising. Krugman held that the special power of television advertising lies in its ability to engage the audience in "learning without involvement." In such learning, people are not instantly persuaded of something nor do their attitudes change. But there is a kind of "sleeper" effect. While viewers are not persuaded, they do alter the structure of their perceptions about a product, shifting "the relative salience of attributes" in the advertised brand. Nothing follows from this until the consumer arrives at the stores when the change occurs at the behavioral level.

While Krugman's theory is about what advertising does to people, some scholars have shifted the focus to the active-audience perspective of advertising persuasion. For the active-audience perspective, the question is not about what advertising does to people but what people do when they are exposed to advertising. Within the domain of active-audience perspective, few scholars have looked at the meanings consumers get from exposure to advertising. Often this question involves not only exposure to any particular advertising stimuli but also living in the cultural environment where advertising becomes environmental. Examples of these perspectives are those of McCracken (1986) and Mick and Buhl (1992).

In his seminal paper, McCracken (1986) argues that advertising, along with the fashion systems, is the major source of the cultural meanings of consumer goods, and as such meanings are transferred from advertising professionals to consumers through the sophisticated system of design and presentation. But whether the meanings are successfully transferred or not also depend on how consumers interpret them. McCracken reasons that there are many options for cultural meanings, and these meanings are constantly changing. In order for an individual to establish a sense of self-identity in this environment, the individual must interpret the mass-produced meanings such that the meanings are tailored into the personalized version of the meanings of good. In another work, McCracken (1987) has also pointed out that consumers look at advertising for

symbolic resources, new ideas, and concrete versions of old ideas with which to advance their "life projects," which is the individual's personal development, refinement, and disposal of specific ideology.

While McCracken's model focuses on how the meanings get moved from advertising sources, Mick and Buhl's (1992) model focuses on how consumers perceive those meanings. Central to Mick and Buhl's conceptualization is the role of consumers' experiences and life situation in their interpretation of advertising stimuli. According to Mick and Buhl, each individual has a unique combination of a limited number of "life themes" and "life projects." Life themes are the profound existential concerns that the individual addresses--consciously or not--in the course of daily life. Life projects are specific ideologies that a person develops, and refines from a range of culturally established alternatives. A person's salient life themes and life projects influence much of their understanding of advertising. Mick and Buhl's (1992) conceptualization finds empirical support in a recent work by Parker (1998). In her study of college students' understanding of alcohol advertising, Parker found from her in-depth interviews with college students that ad interpretations are a function of highly individual cognition developed by young people about themselves, alcohol, and advertising during their lives. Life experiences play a role not only in how people interpret advertising, but also how they relate to and recall the product brands.

The Long-Term Effect of Mass Media and Advertising

Aside from the intended effects of advertising on consumers' choices of goods, many scholars have questioned the long-term, unintended effects of exposure to advertising. David Potter (1969), one of the most renowned critics of advertising, maintained, "Advertising appeals primarily to the desires, the wants--cultivated or natural--of the individual, and it sometimes offers as its goal a power to command the envy of others by outstripping them in the consumption of goods and services." In addition to creating demands that do not exist in the first place, advertising has also been criticized for shaping cultural values. Michael Schudson (1984) noted that people are generally are exposed to advertisements with only minimal involvement and in fact most advertisements do not "talk" directly to specific individuals about specific values.

However, Schudson maintained that advertising has the power to shape consumers' ideas about what constitutes a good life in the Western capitalistic society. According to Pollay (1986), among the cultural values repeatedly promoted in advertising are the encouragement of excessive consumption and the achievement of materialistic ideals among members of society. If these critics are right about the advertising effects on consumers' lasting materialistic values, the implications for the indirect effects of advertising on compulsive buyers could be enormous.

Pollay (1986) noted four aspects that empower advertising to profoundly influence people. Advertising is pervasive in many mass media:, repetitively reinforcing similar ideologies; professionally developed to improve the audience's attention, comprehension, retention, and behavioral impact; and delivered to an audience that is increasingly detached from traditional social and cultural ties such as families, churches, or schools. Although these characteristics of advertising make it likely to influence people far beyond the domain of consumer choices, Pollay (1986) noted that the exact effects of advertising have not been known, and research has not systematically illustrated a long-term influence of advertising.

Literature for Analytical Framework

As noted, this study seeks to understand the roles of mass-mediated sources in the process by which an individual develops compulsive buying problem. To provide rationales for the study, this section discusses two subjects: an overview of paradigmatic issues in mass media effect research, and theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. The purpose of discussing the paradigmatic issues in mass media effect research is to point out how this study contributes to methodological advancement in this area of research. By presenting the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, this section provides a theoretical foundation for the research method used in this dissertation.

Paradigmatic Issues in Mass Media Effect Research

The dominant perspective of the nature of mass media effects has varied over the years from one of powerful effects, which is exemplified by the magic bullet theory, to

one of limited effects, which currently dominates the field of mass media effect research. The limited effects perspective is reflected in a number of "selective influence" models such as Lasswell's (1948) mass communication model, and Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's (1944) theory of two-step-flow of media influence. These selective influence theories, according to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989), focus on the "*here* and *now*" effects of the mass media. That is, they look at what happens to individuals in an immediate time frame when mass media present specific kinds of content to audiences with particular characteristics, instead of dealing with long-term indirect influences of mass media on individuals or culture. The selective influence perspective is also reflected in the mainstream advertising research that looks at advertising effects from the information-processing standpoint (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach 1989).

Although the selective influence theories are still useful in providing a guideline as to the kinds of individual as well as the media factors that must be studied thoroughly in order to understand and predict the effects of mass communication, research of media effects has shifted during the last three decades toward the long-term effects of mass media on people and culture (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989), this emerging perspective is called the "meaning paradigm," because it looks at the role of subjective meanings of media content and their role in the socialization of people within a mass-mediated society. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1971), agenda setting hypothesis (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), modeling theory (Bandura, 1977), and social expectation theory of the media content (DeFleur, 1989) are examples of long-term media effect theories.

Although the theoretical perspective of the mass media effects has shifted away from the limited effects perspective, its research methods, mainly experiment and survey, still predominate the mass media effect research. This is true even in research that deals with the long-term effects of mass media. According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989), when experiment or survey is used to study beyond the scope of single exposure to the mass media content, researchers have not been able to produce the findings that would show the consistent patterns of media effects.

Presently, a major limitation in mass media effects research is marked by a lack of a methodological approach that is widely accepted among scholars as the way to study long-term media effects. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) noted that it would be difficult to imagine the kinds of methodologies that are needed for the study of long-range, indirect, and subtle influences of mass-mediated communications. Thus far, what we know is that the traditional social scientific methods such as experiment or survey are not effective in producing meaningful findings for research questions that deal with long-term, indirect effects of mass-mediated communications.

A New Approach to the Study of Mass Media Effect

Blumer (1969) noted that research on mass media effects mainly focuses on variable analysis. It seeks to pin down the extent of influences certain media content has on the audiences. The shortcoming of this variable-analysis approach, according to Blumer, is that it ignores the way in which the mass media operate in the real world. To further explain, this approach treats the mass media and their target audiences as homogeneous and constant.

Blumer (1969) observed that three characteristics underlie the way in which the media operate in the real world. First, the media content always changes. Mass media are geared to a moving world, and, in a clustering media environment, media professionals are under the pressure to offer something new and different to get people's attention. Second, the audiences are not passive recipients of the media content. Each audience member has its own idiosyncrasies such as interest, sensitivity, responsiveness, and established schemes of definition acquired from interactions with "reference groups." Such responsiveness differs among members of the audience; it also differs for an audience across time frames, for as a person proceeds through life experiences, his sensitivity and responsiveness changes, and so does the way he interprets the media content. Finally, there is the interdependent connection of all forms of communication. People usually attend to a number of media through which the same message might be presented. Thus, the media cannot be regarded as operating in separate and clearly separated areas, but rather as flowing into a vast common arena.

Blumer (1969) pointed out there is a need for a scheme of analysis that respects the three central features of the mass media process. Such analytical scheme, according to Blumer, should follow these guidelines:

1. A study of the effects of media-influence should seek to reflect accurately the empirical world in which the influence is operating.

2. An effort should be made to determine the state and the development of sensitivity of people toward the media-influence.

3. Any given media-influence should be studied *in relation to* other influences which may be operating in the area of concern.

4. It is necessary to consider how the media-influence *enters* the experience of people rather than to turn immediately to its presumed effects.

5. The effect of a given media-influence should be sought in breadth--the interconnection between different media channels. (p. 192-193)

In effect, Blumer calls for a research approach that looks at the "historical dimension" as well as the "moving process" of the media influences. Given the limitations of the positivistic methods (e.g. survey and experiment) in addressing the long-term influences of mass media and advertising as the consumer socialization sources, this study adopts the phenomenological perspective. The fundamental assumption of the phenomenological perspective is that people are active meaning makers of the reality they encounter. Because these meanings are based on people's interpretations, they are necessarily socially constructed and contextually bounded. Because the phenomenological perspective allows a researcher to examine the context and history of the events in a way that the positivistic methods do not, this study is guided by the phenomenological perspective.

Aside from the general phenomenological perspective, this study is based on Herbert Blumer's (1969) assumptions about the fundamental characteristics of human behavior. Blumer (1969) presented these assumptions as a list of premises of what he called "Symbolic Interactionism." These assumptions were drawn primarily from the work of George Herbert Mead (1934). Symbolic interactionism holds that human behaviors are based on the meanings people have toward objects, which could be other

people, their behaviors, or other concrete or abstract entities, and people form these meanings through the process of social interaction. From the symbolic interactionism perspective, the way a person responses to a certain object is not directly influenced by the object itself; it is rather based on how he or she sees the object. Specifically, Blumer's premises of symbolic interactionism are as follows:

> Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (1969, p. 2)

Given the potential of the phenomenological perspective in addressing the context and the history of an event, it is chosen as the central framework guiding this study. Guided by this framework, the in-depth interview is chosen as a means to explore the historical and contextual aspects of what it means to be a compulsive buyer growing up in a given upbringing context and in the social and cultural contexts in which mass media and advertising have become more and more influential as the consumer socialization sources. Furthermore, the in-depth interview is used as a means to understand, from the individuals who live the experience of being compulsive buyers, the nature of the outcomes derived from their socialization through family as well as mass-mediated sources.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The central purpose of this study is to understand the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers. The central purpose of the study is transformed into the following research questions:

1. What is the role of primary socialization agents in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

2. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and primary socialization agents (e.g. family, school, and peer) in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

3. What is the role of the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

4. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

The answers to the research questions were obtained though qualitative in-depth interviews. In order to understand why the study was conducted though the qualitative approach and why the data are collected via in-depth interview, the rationales for qualitative research and the value of in-depth interviews are discussed before the detailed description of the research design is presented.

Rationales for Using a Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach was used in this study for two major reasons. The first reason has to do with the complexity of the issue of consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, an area of inquiry that has been under-explored in the current sociological literature. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contended that qualitative research is generally the most "adequate" and "efficient" way to deal with the difficulties of an empirical situation.

The other reason for using a qualitative approach involves the purpose of the study. As noted, the purpose of the present study is to understand the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers in the context of family, mass media, and advertising. In other words, the purpose of the study deals with what Blumer (1969) called the "moving process" of influences. When the purpose of the study is to understand the process, the qualitative approach, as opposed to the quantitative approach, has been proposed as more appropriate.

According to Maxwell (1996), understanding the process of the phenomenon is but one of the purposes of using the qualitative method. The qualitative method is also suitable when a researcher seeks to understand the meanings and the context in which the phenomenon occurs, or when he tries to develop causal explanations for a phenomenon (Maxwell, 1996). Because the research questions posed in this study involve all the four purposes of the study as suggested by Maxwell, it is important to review Maxwell's discussion of the four ways of using qualitative approach.

Understanding the Meaning

Qualitative methods are suitable when the study seeks to understand not only the outward behaviors that are taking place, but also what influences the behavior. In order to understand what influences the behaviors, the qualitative method can be used to understand people's meanings, the events, the surrounding situations, and the actions. The word, "meaning," according to Maxwell (1996), means the cognition, affect, intentions, and anything else that exhibits "participant's perspectives." The understanding of the participant's perspective is not simply the assessment of the truth or falsity of such perspectives, but the understanding of part of the reality of what constitutes the behaviors.

Understanding the Context

Qualitative methods are a suitable method for understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions. A qualitative study focuses on a small number of individuals or situations and preserves the individuality of each of these in their analyses, rather than collecting data from large samples and aggregating the data across individuals or situations. Qualitative methods,

therefore, enable the researcher to understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur.

Understanding the Process

Qualitative methods allow the assessment of the process by which events and actions take place. Although qualitative research is also concerned with the outcomes, it emphasizes the processes that led to these outcomes, the processes that experiential and survey research is often poor at identifying.

Developing Causal Explanations

Contrary to the traditional perspective that qualitative research cannot identify causal relationships, Maxwell (1996), along with other scholars (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1984), has argued that qualitative research can be used to identify causal explanation. While quantitative research is interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variances in y, qualitative research is interested in how x plays a role in causing y and what the process is that connects x and y. The causal explanation that qualitative research offers is what Miles and Huberman (1984) call "local casualty" (p. 132). Weiss (1994) concretely describes the causal explanation in qualitative research as "the description of a visualizable sequence of events (p. 179)," and notes that qualitative research "supports an assertion of causation by showing a correlation between an earlier event and a subsequent event" (p. 179).

In this study, family, mass media, and advertising are treated as the contextual elements in which the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers occurs. By understanding the meanings to which compulsive buyers assign these socialization sources, it is possible to elucidate the roles family, mass media, and advertising play in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers. In other words, the *local-causality processes* of how these socialization sources influence people with general compulsivity to become compulsive buyers is believed to be best studied via the qualitative approach.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were used to collect the data because it was believed that interviews would allow the assessment of informants' reflections of how advertising

impacts their socialization experiences. As McCracken (1988) noted, the in-depth interview, or so-called the "long interview," can "take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which her or she sees the world" (p. 9). By stepping into the individuals' world, a researcher is able to "see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9).

The in-depth interviews were conducted so that both open-ended responses as well as a certain degree of consistency across the participants on the key issues were achieved. The open-ended responses from the informants are important because they allow the researcher to access the informants' understandings of their socialization experience and how it is related to family, mass media, and advertising. As noted earlier, the participants' understandings are best achieved when the informants are allowed to express how they see the world in their own terms. The open-ended responses will be achieved by allowing the informants to direct the flow of the conversations. The role of the interviewer is to probe, in an unobtrusive manner, the key issues that need to be discussed so that the answers to the initial research questions can be elucidated.

A set of key issues was included in an interview guide. These issues were posed to the informants only if a participant did not mention them during an interview. In addition to serving as a reminder for the interviewer to probe on the key issues, an interview guide was used to ensure that some consistency across informants could be achieved. According to McCracken (1988), the consistency across informants can be achieved by using a structured interview format.

The Interview Guide

The interview guide is composed of two major sections. The first section involves personal information as well as the description and the development of buying behavior. The second section involves the discussion of mass media as well as advertising experiences. (*See Appendix, page 201-211, for the Interview Guide.*) The interviews were conducted with the informants' awareness of the researcher's intention to collect the data for a study on their shopping experiences. The interviews were recorded on audiocassettes with the informants' consent. The interviews were then transcribed

word-by-word into verbatim transcriptions, which was the raw data for the subsequent qualitative analysis.

The Informants

The interviews were conducted with twelve women who both identified themselves as compulsive buyers and who were qualified as compulsive buyers by using the Faber and O'Guinn (1992) Clinical Screener for Compulsive Buying. (*See Appendix, page 239, for the questionnaire adapted from the Screener. Each informant's CB score and basic demographic information are shown in Table 1, page 50.*) These women were recruited on a convenience basis using one of these two approaches. The first approach involved contacting representatives for the Debtor Anonymous groups in these cities: Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee, Atlanta, Georgia, and St. Louis, Missouri. The Debtor Anonymous groups in these cities were chosen because of the convenience of driving distance from the interviewer's location. Eleven informants were recruited using referrals from the representatives who were initially contacted. They all met the standard of the Faber and O'Guinn (1992) Compulsive Buying Scale. To facilitate the potential informants' willingness to participate in the study, a gift of $30 was offered as an incentive for participation.

The other approach used to recruit the informants was the posting of flyer advertisements asking for participation in the study. The flyer advertisements were posted at the Hopkinsville Community College, Hopkinsville, Kentucky. The offering of the same amount of incentive was indicated in the flyer advertisement. A few potential informants responded to the advertisements, but only one met the standard of the Faber and O'Guinn (1992) Compulsive Buying Scale.

Data Analysis

In essence, the goal of the present study was to create a theory that would explain whether and in what manner family, mass media, and advertising and the socialization sources relate to consumers' development of compulsive buying. Because there is not any logico-deductive theory in this area awaiting verification, it is necessary that the theory be freshly built. Glaser and Strauss (1967) contended that the discovery from the

Table 1: Summary of the Informants' Personal Profiles

Informant	Age	Marital Status	Children	Education	Occupation	Household Income	CB Score*	In DA
Pam	39	Married	2	Bachelor's degree	Insurance Adjuster	$100,000	-1.38	3 years
Dorothy	47	Divorced	2	High school	Real estate Consultant	N/A	-4.34	1 year
Rita	46	Divorced	None	Master's degree	Branch manager for a bank	N/A	-5.42	1.5 year
Debra	52	Single	-	Law degree	Defense lawyer Hotel reservation agent	N/A	-5.14	8 years
Mary	37	Married	1	Bachelor's Degree	Homemaker	$50,000	-4.49	8 years
Jan	56	Married	2	High school	Bookkeeper	$60,000	-4.51	6 weeks
Brenda	63	Divorced	6	Master's Degree	Assistant librarian	$12,000	-2.10	2 years
Meg	50	Divorced	1	Working on Bachelor's Degree	Student	$22,000	-3.38	10 years
Barbara	42	Single	-	License for Practice Nursing	Nurse	N/A	-5.04	2.5 years
Pat	53	Divorced	1	Working on Bachelor's Degree	Motivation group organizer	$18,000	-4.63	7 years
Tina	37	Married	2	Working on Master's Degree	Research specialist	$65,000	-4.00	9 months
Jane	52	Divorced	2	Working on Bachelor's Degree	Psychic reader	N/A	-4.68	No

data, termed "grounded theory," is the best approach to generate a theory. Because the theory is based on the data being studied, as opposed to being deduced from *a priori* assumptions, it is likely to fulfill the functions of a sociological theory, including predicting and explaining behaviors, and accommodating theoretical advancement (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), two major tasks are involved in the discovery of a grounded theory. The first task is to generate conceptual categories and their properties from the data. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote, "in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 23). At a practical level, the process of generating conceptual categories is achieved by identifying, coding, and categorizing the patterns in the data while reading through the data. Thus, the first task of data analysis in the present study was to read though the verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The consistent patterns in the data were identified and coded to generate the conceptual categories.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the other task in discovering a grounded theory is to constantly test the emerging hypotheses about the relationships among the conceptual categories. A researcher can test the relationship hypotheses by using a general analytical method called "comparative analysis" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Comparative analysis can be done by constantly comparing the similarities and the differences among the cases in terms of the conceptual categories. In addition to generating a theory, comparative analysis is also useful in checking the accuracy of the data and in expanding empirical generalization. By checking the evidence collected from different cases, the researcher can assess on the factual level whether the evidence is accurate. And by comparing the facts collected from each case that is similar or different, the researcher can generate properties of conceptual categories that enhance the generality and the explanatory power of the categories.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted that comparative analysis could be used to generate two basic kinds of theory. These are substantive and formal theories. Substantive and formal theories differ in the degrees of generality. Formal theory deals with such general concepts as socialization while substantive theory addresses specific

empirical situations. For the present study, the focus is on the specific empirical situation of what roles family as well as mass media and advertising play in the socialization of compulsive buyers. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that if the focus of the study is on a substantive area, the comparison should be made among cases within the same substantive area. Based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) suggestion, the focus of the comparisons on conceptual categories were made among the informants

The data collection must stop at some point. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the data collection stops when the collection of additional data does not bring any new properties for the central categories. Following Glaser and Strauss's redundancy criteria, this study defined redundancy as a lack of additional information from the informants' motivation for shopping. After the twelfth interview, it appeared that every informant, regardless of what type of compulsive buyer they were, exhibited the universal pattern as follows. Due to their upbringings, participants generally have low self-esteem and perceive themselves as not being good enough in their own right as human beings. Given their universal assumption that having more things and being materially successful is the perquisite for being happy, participants who are compulsive buyers use buying primarily as a means to temporarily escape from, as well as to substitute for, this sense of inadequacy. Because it was assumed that any more interviews would not likely o yield any distinctive pattern from the one described above, twelve informants were considered as adequate sample size for the exploratory nature of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following are the research questions in this study:

1. What is the role of primary socialization agents in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

2. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and primary socialization agents (e.g. family, school, and peer) in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

3. What is the role of the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

4. If advertising plays any role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers, what is the nature of the interaction between advertising and the mass media in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers?

These four research questions are an extension of this question, "What kind of meaning does a person acquire from her upbringing as well as from exposure to mass media and advertising that can be linked to her choice of exhibiting her obsessive-compulsive tendency in buying?" In essence, this study is a study of mass media effects, one that addresses the role of interpersonal communications. This study is qualitative by design, and, like any qualitative study, there is a balance between the description of the data as they are conveyed and the interpretation of these data so that some understandings can be obtained. To warrant this balance, the detailed description of each informant and her life is presented in the first section of this chapter. The main topics to be discussed for each informant are her brief demographic information, her upbringing environment, her shopping behavior, her mass media exposure, and her recovery from compulsive buying. To obtain some understanding of these descriptive presentations, the analytical discussions are presented in the other two parts in this chapter. In the second section, the four types of compulsive buyers will be identified. These are the Provider (Informant 1-2: Pam and Dorothy), the Striver (Informant 3-6: Rita, Debra, Mary, and Jan), the

Abused (Informant 7-8: Brenda and Meg), and the Neglected (Informant 9-12: Barbara, Pat, Tina, and Jane). Central to the discussion in this second part are the association of the informants' upbringing environments with their self -perceptions and buying behaviors. In the last section, the many themes of the informants' experiences with mass media and advertising are identified and explored. (*The conceptual scheme representing the synopsis of the findings discussed in this chapter is shown in Figure 1, page 55.*)

Informant Descriptions

Informant 1: Pam

Pam, 39, is a member of Debtors Anonymous in Atlanta, Georgia. Pam lives with her husband and two daughters, eight and ten years old. She has a Bachelor's degree in management and has been working as an "insurance adjuster" for an agency in Atlanta for 13 years. She and her husband, who is an engineer, earn approximately $100,000 a year for the household income.

Pam was born into a low-income family in Rochester, New York. Having grown up in a family filled with physical abuse and alcoholism, Pam remembers her childhood as a "very painful" one. Her father was abusive; her mother was an alcoholic. They divorced when Pam was seven years old. Before the divorce, they both worked for a telephone company. They married young, and because they were Catholic, they did not believe in using birth control. They had seven children by the time Pam's mother was only 30 years old. Pam was the second youngest child. Her father did not drink, but often hit his wife and children. When her father was still around, there was a lot of fear, yelling, and screaming in the house. After the divorce, her father moved away, and they never saw him again. Although Pam did not have to take as much abuse as the older children, her memory of it has had an enduring effect on her self-esteem as well as the way she perceived her later life.

After her father was gone, Pam's fear of the abuse was replaced by the fear of economic insecurity. Her father, who used to be the main source income for the family, left her mother with all the children. Although her mother worked hard to provide for the family, Pam and her siblings had to work odds jobs at very young ages for

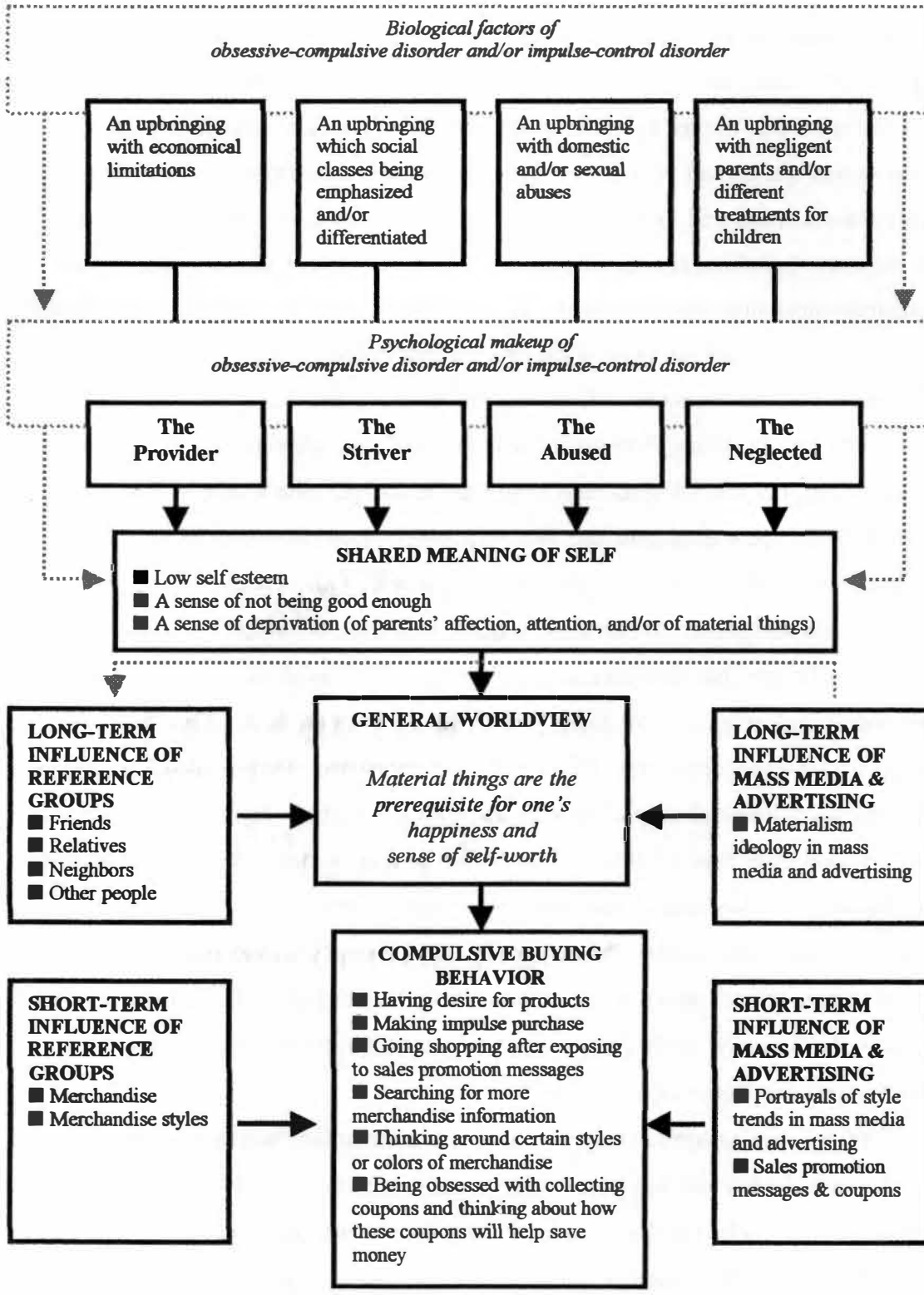

Figure 1: The Socialization of Compulsive Buyers: A Conceptual Scheme of the Findings

supplementary income. At ten years old, she cleaned houses and baby-sat so that she could have money for clothes and personal items. Her mother's income went to mortgage, bills, staple foods, and alcohol. Although Pam learned from her mother the virtues of hard work, as well as the importance of being punctual, she did not learn to save the money she earned. On the weekends, she would spend her money on shopping with her friends in the mall. Pam did not save any money until she was 16 years old when she started working at a grocery store where part of the employees' money was automatically deposited into their saving account. She cashed all the money that was left and spent it on the foods she liked. Pam believes that it was while she worked at the grocery store that her obsession with buying groceries started.

In her teenage years, Pam was addicted to drinking, smoking, and sex. When Pam was young, her mother practically raised her in the bar. She would let Pam play in the bar while she spent time drinking. Not surprisingly, Pam, like some of her siblings, was addicted to alcohol at a young age. At 12 years old, Pam drank, smoked, and sometimes used marijuana. At that time, she saw that those behaviors were very acceptable and somewhat necessary in order for her to fit in with her friends. Pam did not do well in high school. Fortunately, Uncle Billy, who is her father's brother, pulled her away from alcohol and drugs. Uncle Billy was unmarried. He provided Pam and her family with some financial support, and he was Pam's confidant. He was one of the few positive influences in Pam's childhood. Although he was uneducated, he taught Pam the value of education. Because of his advice, Pam went to college. She took school seriously. Besides some grants, Pam worked part-time to pay for her education. She saw college as a part of her "salvation." She says it was the place she could get help and get away from the "insanity" in the house—the house where everyone "focused on themselves and the disease of alcoholism."

Pam met her husband in college. At first, she dated him because she thought he was rich. Later she learned that he just lived in the rich section of the town. Although her husband could not fulfill her every material need, Pam learned that he was the kind who would stick with her regardless of her dysfunctional behavior. They did not get married until after they both graduated, although they had lived together while in college to save

on rent. After an extensive hunt for employment, they decided to move to New York City where Pam got a job at a bank, and her husband got a job as an engineer. Pam had started her insurance job when she had an unexpected pregnancy. She quit the job and moved to the area north of New York City so that they could afford to raise a baby. Pam became a full-time mom after she had another baby.

When she got pregnant and quit her job to take care of the babies, the "trauma" of her childhood began to show its effect. The trauma of her childhood has left her with self-doubt and the fear of economic insecurity. Unfortunately, the fear did not cause her to be more careful about spending. Instead, it caused her to have the feeling of not having enough financial resources and to have the strong desire to shield her loved ones from experiencing the material scarcity she went through. She had some doubt about her worth as a wife, as a mother, and as a productive member of the society. Her greatest fear was that her husband would abandon her and her two small children, and that she would not be able to raise them on her own. She felt she was not good enough to get off the couch and go to work. She did not cope with the fear by turning to drugs as she did in her teenage years; she turned to shopping, especially for groceries and junk food. Hanging around the mall with two kids in the stroller became a way to escape from the pain and the loneliness. Her typical day during the two years of compulsive buying manifestation was filled with her trips to McDonald's, Wal-Mart, and shopping malls. She always took her children with her. Unlike the typical compulsive buyer, Pam rarely bought things for herself. In her attempt to win her family's affection, she bought a lot of toys and items for her babies and gifts for her relatives.

When America was hit by the recession of the early 1990s, Pam and her husband had little choice, but to move south in order to keep their jobs. Pam was transferred to an insurance agency in Atlanta. It was during the period of moving and settling down in Atlanta that the couple incurred the $22,000 in credit-card debt. She took cash advances as well as spent large sums of money on food and household items. Today, Pam and her husband do well financially. They have paid off their debt. They found that they like the warmer climate as well as the "slowness" of the South.

Pam's recovery really started when she was sent to a rehabilitation center for codependence in Philadelphia. She was severely depressed and obsessed with the fear that her husband would abandon her. At the center, she was shut in away from the world and realized her codependence. She quit drinking, became a member of Alcoholic Anonymous and Ala-Non, and took medication for depression. She has been in recovery for seven years—the first four years in AA and Ala-Non and the last three years in Debtors Anonymous. She says it was during the last three years that she was able to break the compulsive buying habits on a regular basis. Today, Pam is happy and reasonably content with herself and her family. She goes to church and teaches religion classes in a Catholic school. She has more friends and is on good terms with her neighbors. She is busy working and tries to give more time, instead of things, to her children. Unlike a typical compulsive buyer, Pam learned to buy things for herself. She learned to relate to her children by spending time with them and not by giving them those gifts.

For Pam, the extent of media exposure is limited. There were TV, newspapers, and magazines that she might use. However, she did not have much time for TV, although the TV was on all the time in her house. She didn't have enough money for magazines. So, it was mostly Uncle Billy's newspapers that she would read to keep up with events. As part of the recovery, Pam says she needs to stay away from TV as much as possible. She also guards against exposing her children to TV.

Informant 2: Dorothy

Dorothy, 47, lives in St. Louis, Missouri. She has two grown children, a 24-year-old son and a 22-year-old daughter. Dorothy has been divorced from her husband for 14 years. She says she divorced him because she was fed up with him being a drug addict who was unfaithful and physically abusive. After the divorce, Dorothy raised her two children on her own. Her husband never recovered from addictions and became homeless. Now her children have grown up, have families of their own. She lives about 20 minutes away from them. Dorothy has lived by herself during the past four years. She bought a two-bedroom condominium two years ago and is still paying for it.

However, a week after the interview, Dorothy said her daughter, who has just divorced, and her grandson will move in temporarily with her.

Although Dorothy does not have a college degree, she is very professional in what she does. She has been trained, mostly through her career, in accounting. She has a strong work ethic and managerial skills. At 17 years old, Dorothy was employed at the courthouse in the town where she grew up. There, she learned accounting and managerial skills. She met her husband and married him while she was employed at the courthouse. After four years of working at the courthouse, she was employed to run offices for various businesses: a retail nursery, physical therapy clinic, emergency and medical center, a company that makes medical equipment, and a real estate agency. Besides working full-time and raising children, over the years, she has managed to take various college courses one at a time. Dorothy took those courses not because she wanted a degree, but because she wanted the knowledge that might enhance her performance in the workplace.

There have been times when Dorothy was out of work. Five years ago, being overwhelmed by a hothead boss, Dorothy quit her job. She says his violent outburst with an employee reminded her of the violence she had experienced from her husband and her father. The incident triggered one of her major depressions. While out of work, Dorothy went to school full-time for almost two years. She took various courses in real estate management. Then she started working for a real estate agency. At one point, she was able to earn as much as $60,000 a year, and given her lack of college degree, Dorothy was proud of what she could make. But regardless of how much money she was able to make, Dorothy recalls that she never had any savings. She would spend practically all she made on herself, her loved ones, and charity causes. This buying practice does not cause any financial problems as long as she is employed. The problem comes, however, when she is out of work, and, consequently, is forced to live on credit cards. This year, she has been out of work for eight months, and she has been experiencing financial difficulties. Having drained every credit card she has, she is behind on paying bills and is living on a very tight budget. Dorothy has been back working in real estate in the last month. She is now a licensed real estate broker. She has already completed a transaction

and is looking forward to completing another one soon. Because she is paid on a commission basis, Dorothy is expecting to make $125,000 or more a year.

As a wife and a mother, Dorothy has always been the breadwinner of the family. She made enough money to support herself and her children when they still depended on her. Her sense of self-worth, she says, depends largely on her ability to perform in the workplace. Having grown up in a deprived and abusive environment, Dorothy sees herself as a caretaker--someone who tends to cater to her loved ones' every need and to shield them from sorrow and hardship. Now she realizes that her caring and protective tendency has, unfortunately, made her an enabler for her husband and her children's dysfunctional behaviors. She wishes she had not put up with her husband's irresponsible and abusive behavior for so long. She wishes she had not given her children everything they wanted. Now she realizes that what she thought was an act of caring has, unintentionally, turned her children into compulsive buyers.

Despite her strength and ability to endure adversity, Dorothy has low self-esteem and is prone to depression. One of the words she uses to describe herself is "elusive." Outwardly, Dorothy functions well in the workplace. Inwardly, however, Dorothy often feels insecure and worthless. Her self-esteem, she says, fluctuates according to external activities, such as her performance at work and what others say about her. She recalls that she could be easily crushed by her husband's criticism. When he told her that she was worthless, she believed it, for it resonated with what her father had told her as a child that she would never amount to anything.

The sense of worthlessness that her father instilled in her is as vivid as the memories of the abuse that she as well as her siblings experienced from her father. Dorothy grew up in a small town just outside the city of St. Louis. Her father had managerial jobs in supermarkets. Her mother, who is now retired, was a bank teller. They married young and ended up having six children by the time her mother was only in her late 20s. Dorothy is the third child. She had one older brother, one younger brother, two older sisters, and two younger sisters. Her father, who had been abused as a child, was abusive, verbally, physically, and sexually. He molested one of Dorothy's younger sisters. Although her mother was compassionate, she was helpless. She was depressed,

did not know how to get help for herself and her children, and sometimes used shopping as an escape.

Because she was ashamed of her abusive father and her poverty-stricken family, Dorothy avoided socializing with people. She was very conscious about the dysfunctional aspects of her family and often found herself comparing her family to those she saw in the mass media as well as those of her friends. In those families, she saw the things that did not exist in her family—the furniture that was matched and arranged orderly, the expression of warmth and affection of parents toward their children, and the regularity of activities that family members did together. In her family, everyone except her father lived in fear. Besides the physical abuse, Dorothy, like her mother and her siblings, regularly received critical remarks from her father, and based on those remarks, Dorothy developed her poor self-image. Her mother was the only source of encouragement. She kept reminding her that, in spite of her dysfunctional father, she was normal and that if she worked hard, she could succeed in life. Although her father's remarks seemed to overpower her mother's encouragement, Dorothy managed to make the best of the situation. She was an attentive student and did well in school. She did not watch much TV or listen to much radio. She could not afford any magazines, but might take a glance at them while checking out from grocery stores. She was in charge of the household chores and helped her mother take care of her younger siblings.

When she was 16, Dorothy learned that her father had sexually abused one of her younger sisters. While her mother chose to ignore the incident, Dorothy reported it to the authority and then asked the court to remove her from her parents' custody on the ground that they were not fit parents. The court granted her request, and she stayed with her adopted parents. She continued visiting and helping her mother take care of her younger siblings. Her parents finally divorced, and Dorothy never saw her father after the divorce. She left her adopted parents and started living on her own when she was 17.

Growing up, Dorothy was deprived of material needs. Her parents could not give her much of anything a typical child would want. Most of her clothes were handed down from her relatives, and having no decent cloths was one of the reasons she did not feel like hanging out with friends. It was not until she started earning money that Dorothy

could buy herself personal items such as clothes or shoes. Normally, however, Dorothy would not buy anything fancy for herself. She prefers blue jeans, athletic shoes, and sweatshirts. Most of her spending was on grocery and household items. Trying to win her children's love as well as shielding them from material deprivation she had experienced as a child, Dorothy spent lavishly on her children. It was not until her children grew up and left the home that she shopped for some fancy clothes and accessories for herself. Even then, she would only do so during her periodic shopping sprees.

Dorothy had never realized that she had a problem with money until she went with her friend to a Debtors Anonymous meeting about five years ago. Her problem, she says, is that she has never learned to save money. She uses most of what she earns and then faces financial difficulties when the hard times come. Presently, she has incurred a large credit-card debt from the shopping sprees she went on during the past eight months. She is behind in all of her bills, but she is optimistic about her earning potential as a real-estate broker.

Informant 3: Rita

Rita, 46, is a member of Debtors Anonymous (DA) in St. Louis, Missouri. She is living by herself. Rita has been divorced for 17 years. She was married as soon as she finished high school. Then she and her husband moved from Granite City, which is across the Mississippi river from St. Louis, to St. Louis. Her husband worked odd jobs, and they lived on her husband's small income. Besides being a housewife, she took college courses. After nine years of marriage, Rita saw that there was no point in staying married to a man who had a drinking problem and who had no plans for the future. They rarely had enough money to sustain themselves. They had no plan to buy a house or to have children. Then, her husband decided to move to Las Vegas, and Rita realized that she neither wanted to move with nor stay married to him. She decided to divorce her husband and stayed in St. Louis.

Today, Rita enjoys being single and has no plans to remarry. The main thing in her life is learning and growing spiritually. She loves reading, especially about arts and psychology. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, Rita went to work in a

picture-framing store. She also used to work as an administrative assistant. Presently, she is a branch manager at a bank located in a discount store. Rita also has a Master's degree in psychology. After completing the degree, she did some work in counseling but found that it was hard to find a job with a good salary. However, she is now going back to work in counseling again. So besides running a bank branch, she also works part-time for an agency that does counseling for disabled people.

Rita was born and raised in a low-income family. Her father was a school custodian; her mother was a telephone operator. Both are now retired and live in Granite City. Rita has a brother who is two years younger and with whom she has always been close. Unlike her brother, however, the young Rita was more sensitive and more prone to comparing herself to others. Thus, while they grew up together, Rita's growing-up experience is different from that of her brother. To her, growing up was more difficult and more painful. She grew up having no self-esteem. Specifically, she felt unloved by her parents, and she felt inferior to her friends at school. At home, she and her brother drew parallels between her parents and that of the characters in the sitcom, *All in the Family*. Her father, like Archie Bunker, was dogmatic and domineering. Although he provided for his children's basic needs, he rarely showed his affection toward them. Her mother played the role of a submissive housewife as portrayed by Edith. There have been times when Rita resented her mother's passivity. Given her father's lack of warmth and her mother's emotional void, Rita came to view herself as someone unworthy of attention, even from her own parents.

Given their limited financial resources, Rita's parents were very careful with money. They rarely spent money for anything beyond the basic needs of the family. Rita grew up feeling very deprived of material things. She had only a few toys, and most of her clothes were handed down from her cousins. Feeling unloved by her parents and deprived of material things, Rita learned that there was an association between a lack of material things and a lack of love. For Rita, the fact that her parents rarely gave her anything was a reflection of her unworthiness of being loved. Rita's sense of lacking got even worse when she was sent to the Catholic school, where most of her peers were from more affluent backgrounds. When she was invited to some of her friends' houses, she

noticed the differences between her and her friends' socio-economic statuses. Rita has a vivid memory of herself being wrongfully blamed by her friend's mother for a younger son's minor injury when he fell into a stream. Rita felt put down and still believes that her feelings were justified by the way the mother looked at her. From this experience, Rita learned that being poor, as reflected by her wearing cheap outfits, was a justification for being treated unfairly.

Her financial situation changed after the divorce. She was employed, and she had credit cards. Being on her own for the first time with credit cards, Rita shopped compulsively for expensive clothes and spent money on traveling. Consequently, Rita has incurred a large credit-card debt.

In her younger years, especially in her teens and her 20s, Rita had no self-esteem. Growing up with parents who were too reserved to express their love for children by hugging or giving encouraging words, Rita felt as if she was left alone. She acquired early on a sense of inferiority about herself and a conviction that a lack of material things was a reason for her to be seen as less than others. There used to be a sense of helplessness in Rita's thinking. She felt that her life was destined to be unhappy, and that there was nothing she could do about it. It took almost three decades before Rita came to a full realization that much of her thinking about herself and the ways she had related to other people as well as how she perceived the acquisition of material things was wrong. By acquiring the many things she had wanted as well as knowing some people who were rich and successful but still miserable, Rita gradually acquired an understanding that true happiness does not have anything to do with one's material wealth. Today, after being in DA for almost two years, Rita has become a truly joyful person. She accepts herself the way she is. She does not go shopping as much as she used to, and she has become very mindful of her spending. More importantly, she has refrained from charging on her credit cards for almost as long as she has been in DA.

As for the media exposure, Rita saw a lot of movies as a child. She either went with her friends or was taken by her parents. Since the age of twelve, when she was allowed to stay up late, Rita has been a consistent user of TV. Her program choices were pretty much dictated by her father's selection when she was still with her parents. Her

father would watch sitcoms like *All in the Family, Matlock*, or *Mary Taylor Moore*, and so did everyone in the family. Today, Rita likes to watch dramas on TV. Some of her favorite shows have been *ER, Once and Again, The X Files, Family Law, Judging Amy, the West Wing, Ally McBield, Buffy, Dawson Creek*, and *The Practice*. By observing herself jumping from one favorite show to another, she has learned something about herself. She sees herself as being prone to boredom. Rita did not read much as a child. However, her desire to grow and to learn has made Rita an avid reader. She reads some newspapers just to keep up with the events, but she loves to read about psychology and literature.

Informant 4: Debra

Debra, 52, was born and has spent most of her life in Knoxville, Tennessee. Debra lost her eyesight when she was three years old. In spite of her disability, she has managed to complete three college degrees, including a law degree, a Bachelor's, and a Master's degree. She has a passion for learning languages. She majored in Spanish in both undergraduate and graduate studies. She is particularly fluent in Spanish and French. She also knows Arabic and is now studying Chinese with a private tutor. Debra used to teach college Spanish classes. Besides taking cases as a defense lawyer, she is now working full-time as a hotel reservation agent. In addition to providing her with a steady income, working at the reservation agency allows her to use her diverse language skills with international clients.

Debra has never been married. In the past three years, she has been sharing an apartment with a female roommate who is also blind. She sees her mother, who visits and brings groceries, at least once a week. She rarely sees her father, who has long been divorced from her mother. Besides working, learning languages, and keeping up with the news, Debra regularly goes to at least one Twelve-Step meeting a week. She is a member of Debtors Anonymous, Ala-Non, Overeaters Anonymous, and CODA or Codependence Anonymous. Besides compulsive spending, Debra also has the problem of being overweight.

Debra is the only child of a mother who is now retired as a high school teacher and a father who works in construction. Her parents, now divorced, had a tumultuous

relationship. Her father, who is agreeable when he is not drinking, but becomes verbally and physically aggressive when he is drunk, and her mother would engage in fights and quarrels. They fought more often when her father was drunk. The fights either involved her father attacking her mother or the other way around. Regardless of the circumstances, Debra found herself trying to untangle them. Her mother was not her father's only target. Sometimes he would vent his rage on Debra through harsh comments and physical attacks. Debra grew up observing her parents' dysfunctional relationship that went on even after she left for college. Through the years, Debra's reaction toward her parent's battles changed from being scared to being indifferent. She had learned to see through the dysfunctional nature of her parent's relationship, which was mostly due to her father's unstable character.

What is remarkable about Debra is that she rarely let the fact that she is blind or that she did not have stable family environment hinder her growth and her joyfulness. In fact, her physical disadvantage has been her motivation to do well in school and to keep on learning and growing intellectually. Instead of feeling sorry for herself, she was driven to succeed and to amaze others with her achievement, in spite of her limitation. She was quite successful with her endeavor. She was an outstanding student and was awarded a scholarship to attend the University of California at Berkley., but her mother was concerned for her safety and refused to let her go. Debra ended up attending a local college. During her school years, her classmates were drawn to her upbeat personality as well as to her academic capability. The person who is most responsible for Debra's enduring sense of optimism and love of learning is her mother, who has always been devoted to her. Her mother saw that Debra had all the books she wanted and had a private tutor to read those books to her. At a very young age, she rewarded Debra when she did well in school and encouraged her to do more. By the time she was six years old, Debra had developed a lifelong "insatiable desire for books." More importantly, she kept encouraging Debra and saw to it that people did not discriminate against Debra based on her disability.

In spite of her impressive education background and mental capacity, her career growth has been hindered by her disability. For example, she lost her teaching job

because of it. Moreover, as a defense lawyer, she has had a hard time getting a job at a law firm and getting a case. In spite of her strength and unbeatable optimism, she sometimes has some doubt about her self-worth and her ability to make it in the workplace. Thanks to her enduring optimism, her doubts about herself are more momentary rather than chronic.

Although being blind is not an obstacle for Debra, there are problems in her life that Debra struggles with daily. These problems are her being overweight, which in turn brings about many health problems, and her inability to control her spending. Debra has been and still is in a financial quagmire. She has incurred a large credit-card debt from shopping. She has been sued four times for the money that she owes. In spite of her eligibility and difficulties, remarkably, Debra could not see herself asking for welfare assistance. Her main source of income is now from working at the reservation agency, and she pretty much lives from paycheck to paycheck. Having bounced checks numerous times, Debra is not able to visit many local stores.

As noted, Debra struggled during her school years to prove that she was a capable student. Now as an adult, Debra is still struggling to prove, especially to her mother, that she is well off economically. She tries to hide from her mother as well as from others that she is in DA, has a shopping compulsion, and is deeply in debt. Her mother, who is rather image-conscious, does not want to acknowledge Debra's problems. Besides counseling fees and taxi fares, Debra spends most of her money on exotic foods, and innovative things such as kitchen and stationery gadgets. She is driven to give people gifts, which she sometimes cannot afford. She loves it when people are amazed by her gadgets and what she has to go through to acquire them. She says there is a "dichotomy" in her life—the difference between what she really is and what she appears to be. The self that she tries to hide from others is someone who is irresponsible with money and someone who puts herself in financial difficulties by buying things she cannot afford for herself and for others, just to impress people that she is someone with an "unlimited supply" of everything—time, money, and knowledge.

Debra has been in DA for about eight years, with a two-year relapse during those years. Although Debra is still deeply in debt and lacks any long-term financial planning,

she has become more conscientious about her spending. Having no credit cards and trying not to bounce checks, she is more mindful of her spending and going on a shopping trip on which she is prone to buying things on impulse. Although there has been an improvement in Debra's financial responsibility, her recovery process has been slow. In spite of the financial troubles and the humiliations she has experienced, Debra does not exactly feel as though she has "hit bottom" yet. Her optimism could be the factor that shields her from feeling severely depressed or ashamed or burdened by her behavior. At one point in the interview, Debra says she is going to be happy no matter what. Interestingly, unlike the other informants, Debra does not fall prey to advertising messages. Indeed, she wishes she had more access to merchandise information, such as the catalogs or ads in the brail version of some of the magazines she reads.

Since her childhood, Debra has been exposed to a vast array of the editorial part of the mass media. In her earlier years, she watched a lot of drama as well as documentaries about animals. Since her early 20s, Debra has developed a keen interest in current events. She reads the brail version of weekly news publications such as the *New York Times* as well as *The Washington Post*. She rarely watches TV.

Informant 5: Mary

Mary is a 37-year-old member of Debtors Anonymous in Nashville, Tennessee. She has been married for seven years and is raising a three-year-old daughter. Before settling down in Nashville, Mary lived in New York and worked as a marketing specialist. She has a Bachelor's degree in marketing. Mary has been in Debtors Anonymous for eight years. Although Mary has engaged in binge eating from time to time, she, unlike most compulsive buyers in the study, has never had a weight problem.

After she was married, she quit her job and followed her husband to Nashville. She is now a full-time homemaker. Her husband runs his own business. Mary has an annual household income of about $50,000. Generally, Mary and her husband have a good relationship. However, there have been some problems in their relationship stemming from her husband's drinking problem.

Mary was born and raised in a small town in Arkansas. She has three younger sisters. Her father, now retired, ran a small business; her mother has been working as a

secretary for small offices. Her parents divorced when Mary was 18. Both remarried. Mary has a loving relationship with her father, who is kind and loving. However, a lot of time her father was at work, and thus did not have much time for the family. Mary's memory of her mother, however, has not been as loving as the one she has with her father. Although her mother took good care of Mary and her sisters, she did not spend time talking or showing affection toward Mary and her sisters. One of Mary's impressions of her mother is that she is very self-conscious about appearance and status. She would make comments about people regarding the size of their house or the things they had.

At the age of 19, after completing high school, Mary left home and enrolled at a community college in her hometown. In order to support herself, she spent much of her time working at odd jobs. School did not seem to be her priority, and thus she did not do well in college. She saw herself as "not quite in the mainstream of the college."

Besides working and studying, Mary also spent a lot of time shopping. Her father bought her a car when she was 16 years old. Since then, she has been shopping by herself. She, however, does not remember her shopping as excessive until she was in college. As she could not afford to buy much of anything during those years, she mostly went window-shopping. By the time she completed college, Mary had accumulated credit-card debt, and by the time she started her career working for a small company in her hometown, she found herself having a hard time applying for a credit card.

Mary was in her mid-20s when she moved to New York. She started earning more money working as a marketing specialist for a large corporation. Her shopping, along with her buying, escalated. In spite of her large income, Mary spent most of it shopping for clothes. She found herself writing bad checks, mainly because she did not keep track of her spending. Although Mary had recognized her tendency to have money problems, she did not seek help dealing with her problem until she was 28 years old. She started going to Debtors Anonymous and, with the support from her "sponsor" and a "pressure group," she learned for the first time some financial discipline.

Mary became better at living within the budget when she moved to Nashville. However, she continued to spend a lot of time shopping. Interestingly, she did not see

herself as a compulsive shopper until she already had a baby and found herself still spending a lot of time shopping. Before this realization, Mary merely saw herself as someone who had a problem with money.

Today, Mary still struggles to adhere to her spending plan. She goes to the DA meetings on a regular basis. There are still some periods when she "slips" into an episode of compulsive buying, mainly during the holiday shopping season. Generally, however, she does not shop as much as she used to prior to her DA membership, and she closely monitors her vulnerability to compulsive buying.

Mary's pattern of media use has evolved from an entertainment-oriented mode to an information-oriented mode. As a child, Mary liked to watch situation comedies on TV. She also liked to read children books with fantasy stories. As a teenager, she liked to read women's magazines for fashion and make-up ideas. She did not have much time for television while she was in college, as most of her time was spent working and hanging out with friends. Today, Mary has become more conscientious about keeping herself informed. She is particularly interested in what is going on in politics and social trends. She reads magazines such as *Fortune, Atlantic Monthly*, and *George*. She regularly watches TV news and a few situation comedies.

Informant 6: Jan

Jan, 56, lives with her husband in St. Louis, Missouri. She has been married for almost 33 years. Jan has two grown sons. She and her husband are close to their first son, who also lives in town. They have a difficult relationship with their adopted son, who now lives in Florida. His addiction to drugs has contributed to the problem in their relationship. Jan has been running an office for her husband's auto-part shop for 20 years. She and her husband have been making about $60,000 annually. Unfortunately, however, the business has not been doing well. Thus, she and her husband are in the process of closing it. With a non-degree certificate from a business college and 20-years experience in running an office, she is now looking for employment. Although Jan is generally an upbeat person, she has had some temporary setbacks with her adopted son, with her weight and with her family's financial situation. Now that her adopted son is grown and gone, and she has lost a lot of weight, her major setback is her financial

problems. Going to Debtors Anonymous is one of the ways she copes with the problem. Although Jan has been in DA for only a month and a half, she is not new to Twelve-Step programs. She has already been in Overeaters Anonymous for five years prior to her participation in DA.

Jan was born and raised in St. Louis. She lost both of her parents by the time she was 16 years old. Her father was killed in a car accident when she was six years old. Her mother died of respiratory-related diseases when Jan was 16 years old. Jan and her mother lived with Jan's grandmother after the death of Jan's father. Jan spent most of her childhood and teenage years under the care of her grandmother. She and her grandmother lived on Social Security and Welfare benefits. Except for having limited financial resources, Jan had a good experience growing up. Unlike other informants in the study, Jan had experienced no abuse. Jan's grandmother was caring, and she and her grandmother were close. She had a few friends she spent time with eating out and shopping.

Given a relatively stable family environment, Jan's untimely loss of her parents has not been an unbearable issue in her life. Except for the difficulty with her adopted son, Jan and her husband have a good marriage. For the most part, Jan has been content with her life. However, there were three issues that could inhibit Jan from being fully content with her life. One of the issues involves her tendency to compare herself to others. She tends to be envious of others and to be covetous of the things or the quality she sees in certain people. Another issue involves her tendency to be overweight. Food, like shopping, is Jan's drug of choice. The other issue involves Jan's belief that money is the answer for much of her problem. She truly wishes she would win a lottery so that she could have enough money to bail her and her husband out of their financial problems. Then her marriage, which has recently been stressed by her resentment toward her husband's financial management, would be improved.

Food and shopping have always have been an important part of Jan's life, and she finds herself bouncing back and forth between the two. Her observation is that when the eating is good, the shopping is bad, and vice versa. Jan shopped with her friends while she was growing up, but she could not afford to buy much of anything. She was more

involved with eating rather than shopping. She would eat out with friends, or she would stay home cooking and eating with her grandmother. Her shopping escalated after she was married. She tended to shop more when she was frustrated or felt lonely. She was overweight then, and so she would buy things either for her sons or for the house. In the past five years, however, she has mostly shopped for herself.. Having lost her weight, she is more confident about her body, so she shops for clothes, shoes, and jewelry.

Jan has been in Debtors Anonymous for a month and a half. She learned about DA through Overeaters Anonymous where she has gone for five years. She is learning about financial planning and techniques in dealing and negotiating with creditors. Although Jan still loves to shop and wishes she could afford to buy more things, being in DA has taught her to be more mindful about sticking with her spending plan and avoiding a more elusive kind of debt such as bouncing checks.

Jan's pattern of media use has been mostly for entertainment purposes. She did not watch much TV while she was growing up, but she liked to listen to music on the radio. She liked to read *Stars*, which is a magazine about events and people in entertainment business. She did not read many newspapers growing up. Today, she reads some local newspapers, but most of her media exposure is with TV. She likes to watch sitcoms and talk shows that deal with human-relationship issues.

Informant 7: Brenda

Brenda is a 63-year-old library assistant. She lives in Atlanta. Brenda has six grown children and has been divorced from her husband for 15 years. All of her children live in Little Rock, Arkansas, where their father lives. Nine years ago, Brenda left Little Rock for Atlanta and was employed a year later at the library where she is working now. She is now making about $12,000 a year. Brenda loves her job, and in spite of her lack of formal training in library science, she has learned over the years to perform most of what a trained librarian could do. Brenda has degrees in Nursing and Secondary Education. She practiced nursing up until she was pregnant with her first child. Presently, she is living with her boyfriend. He owns a house and lets her stay there to save on rent. She has been attending Debtors Anonymous for two years, but before that she had been in the other Twelve-Step programs, Overeaters Anonymous and Ala-Non.

Brenda was born in a small town in New Jersey. She spent her childhood in various small towns in New Jersey, as her father, who was a Methodist minister, was relocated frequently. After living for a long time in Delanco, which is across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, her parents moved to Kentucky. Her father took a teaching position there, and she and her family lived in a town near Lexington. After staying with her uncle's family in New Jersey for a year to finish high school, she followed her parents to Kentucky. She stayed there three years until she completed her degree in education. Then, she left home when she moved to Cleveland, Ohio, to pursue a nursing degree. She met her future husband and was married. She and her husband lived in Cleveland for a while before moving to New Mexico. She and her husband moved often while they were married. They used to live in Taos and Wagon Mound in New Mexico. They used to live in Denver, Colorado. Finally, they moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. They lived for a long time in Little Rock and moved three times while in that city. After they divorced, her husband and all of her children stayed in Little Rock, while Beth moved to Atlanta. While she was still living with her parents, her father, who was a Methodist minister, was relocated in various towns in the Northeast. She also found herself having to move often after she was married to her husband, who, as Brenda sees it, believed that moving would solve the problems he was experiencing. Because he was an alcoholic, she thinks, his discontentment with where he was and the compulsion to move away from it was typical. Being a medical doctor, her husband had no trouble finding employment anywhere he went. But moving has never actually been the answer to his problems--at least those concerning his relationship with Brenda. His main problem was drinking. He and Brenda often disagreed on how they managed money and how they disciplined their children. Brenda was more responsible with how she spent and kept track of their money. The disagreement often escalated into physical abuse, which eventually led to their separation and divorce.

But Brenda's experience of growing up was more painful than her experience of being married to her ex-husband. Brenda is the only child of a father who was very religious, flamboyant, and abusive and a mother who was a perfectionist. The way her parents treated her, she believes, had enduring detrimental effects on her self-esteem, and

shopping had been a means she used to suppress the painful feelings. In the church, her father would deliver the fire-and-brimstone type of preaching. At home, while he showed no sign of kindness toward Brenda, he taught her to always be giving and to put the needs of others above those of her own. Because of his teaching, Brenda had a generous heart. She has donated a lot of money to charities and evangelical missions. Her father's fire-and-brimstone kind of preaching, however, has over the years propelled her to find answers from other spiritual paths. Moreover, Brenda has been loaded with guilt, which in turn compels her to fulfill the needs of others, sometimes at the expense of her self-interest. For example, she used to blame her husband's dysfunctional behaviors on herself and feel responsible for the failure of her marriage. Moreover, until she learned differently in DA, Brenda had never saved money, and much of her spending had been on donations.

Besides his religious message, Brenda's sense of self is also detrimentally affected by the abuse, physically and sexually, from her father. She felt abused when he disciplined her by spanking her bare-bottom when she was as old as 15. She experienced incest but because she was so young that she did not know what was happening. The incest went on until she was 15 years old, when her parents moved to Kentucky so that her father could take on a teaching position at a seminary. She was left to stay with the family of her uncle in Durango, New Jersey, so that she would be able to complete high school. Brenda did not report the incest until when, at 41 years old, her husband sexually abused her, and the incidence triggered the pain she had suppressed for years. In all those years, Brenda did not have the courage to confront her parents about the incest, and, as she sees it now, her lack of courage was linked to her craving for their approval. Moreover, she was also suppressed by the fear that nobody, including her mother, would believe her. And when she finally had the courage to speak up, she received the kind of reactions she had anticipated. Her father denied the incest. Her mother, along with most of her relatives, was angry at the accusation and refused to believe it. Frustrated, Brenda became more radical and vocal about revealing her experience. She was on several panels for a rape crisis center. From that point on, her relationship with her parents remained estranged until their death.

Besides the incest and the religious indoctrination, Brenda's low self-esteem may link to how she related to her mother. During her childhood and teenage years, Brenda's sense of self was overshadowed by her mother's image of being a perfect woman with a balanced social and family life. At home, she would keep the house so spotless that Brenda wonders if she had a compulsive disorder. What her mother enjoyed the most was socializing. She was very at ease around people and was able to carry herself gracefully around them. Brenda calls her mother a "social butterfly." Ambivalence is the most appropriate word to describe Brenda's attitude toward her mother. While she marveled at her mother's social skills, she has always despised her mother's emotional indifference and constant concern for maintaining the image of their family. In contrast to her flamboyant parents, Brenda was a very quiet child. Although Brenda ha been able to develop and retain many lifelong friendships, she has always been uncomfortable around new people.

Growing up during the Great Depression, Brenda's parents knew the value of money. They were generally very frugal with money. Thanks to their strict guidance, Brenda is generally prudent with money. However, due to her lack of long-term financial planning, Brenda has been in financial difficulty. It happened five years ago when she was diagnosed and treated with cancer. Without health insurance and savings, she was unable to pay the hospitals bills. She has paid off her debt now and learned the value of saving and planning. Being in debt also led Brenda to Debtors Anonymous, where she learned to create a spending plan. Besides a lack of long-term planning, Brenda sees herself as a compulsive shopper because she sometimes uses shopping as escape from her emotional setbacks. Occasionally, Brenda gets on the Internet and shops for books. It provides her with a temporary escape from the emotional setbacks caused either by her painful past or present circumstances.

Brenda is more exposed to the mass media and advertising now than when she was growing up. As an attentive student, Brenda did not watch much television. She began to watch more television after she was married and became a stay-at-home mom. She was addicted to watching soap operas, and given her frequent change of residence, she took comfort in knowing that her favorite soap operas would always be on wherever

she was. Today she gravitates toward the information side of the mass media content. Although she still watches a few soap operas and TV dramas regularly, she has become more interested in keeping up with current issues. She likes talk TV as well as radio talk shows.

Informant 8: Meg

Meg, 50, lives in St. Louis, Missouri. She was born in Pontiac, Michigan. She moved to St. Louis with her family when she was ten years old. She has been married twice and has been divorced for 12 years. She has a 14-year-old son from her second husband. Her son stays with her every other week. Meg is now a full-time student in nursing. She is on disability social security and receives about $22,000 a year.

Meg's life is marked with a recurrence of depression, and her struggle against it. Although she thinks of herself as a sincere and caring person, she also has a lot of self-loathing and self-doubt. She feels ashamed of herself. She is not at ease when it comes to interacting with people, mostly because she is uncertain about how open she should be toward any person she encounters. Sometimes she felt betrayed when she put too much expectation on people whom she had not known well. Feeling betrayed, she says, could send her to the other extreme of being totally mistrustful of people.

Meg's disposition is understandable, given her upbringing. She has a father she calls a "rage-aholic," referring to a person who is ridden with anger and easily irritated. When he got angry, mostly at his children's behavior, he became violent. There was a lot of hollering and yelling going on. A typical scene in her household was for her father to get mad and go after and hit her and her two younger brothers. Her mother would try to protect them from him. And when he got mad and went after her mother, she and her brothers would try to protect their mother. Her father, Meg says, was very smart and well read. Nevertheless, because of his inability to control his temper, he had a hard time keeping his jobs, which were mostly in manufacturing plants. Besides protecting her and her brothers during her father's violent behaviors, her mother did not contribute much to Meg's psychological health. She was what Meg calls "emotionally un-present." She showed no affection toward her children, and it was a common scene for her to talk to herself, complaining about one thing or another. She rarely lost her temper with her

children, but once she did she could be violent, such as throwing things around.

From the age of seven to 11, Meg was sexually abused by her father. She told her mother about the abuse, but she did not take any action to help her. The abuse went on until Meg told her girlfriend, and then her girlfriend's mother reported it to the school principal. Her father was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. After he was released from the prison, he moved into the family home and tried to abuse Meg again when Meg was 14 years old, but she insisted that he never approach her ever again. Her parents' marriage did not last. They divorced when Meg was 27 years old and was already been married to her first husband. Four years later, her father committed suicide. The incest, Meg says, had more detrimental effects on her self-esteem than anything she had experienced during her childhood.

Meg says that she is susceptible to many forms of addiction. She is addicted to food. She tried drinking, but decided to quit for fear of becoming addicted to alcohol. Although Meg has never "hit bottom" with alcohol, she still goes to Alcoholic Anonymous. She also has a tendency to get involved with alcoholic men. Her first husband was an alcoholic who rarely stayed home. She divorced him after a few years of marriage only to find herself being married to another man who was also an alcoholic. Meg was 35 when she married the second time. She quit a job at a telephone company where she had worked since she was 17. After four years of an unhappy marriage, her husband asked for a divorce. Her husband, being an alcoholic and a workaholic engineer, lived in his own world. Meg says relating to him was "painful." Her son, who was then three years old, once used the word "depressed" to describe his father. The divorce happened, as Meg sees it, because once she was in recovery she pushed her husband to seek help with his alcohol problem, and he was not ready for it.

Meg is currently in debt, which was incurred from the treatment for depression and from injuries when she was involved in a car accident five years ago. Meg's other addiction is shopping, but she has never incurred a massive amount of debt from it. Not wanting others to know about her shopping behaviors, Meg prefers shopping alone. She does not always shop compulsively, but she had shopped compulsively for different categories of merchandise at different times in her life. Meg, who used to be very

conscious about her appearance, would shop compulsively from time to time for clothes and accessories. Now she does not spend much money on clothes. Instead, when she feels down she goes shopping for crafts and health foods. Ten years ago, when she was released from the treatment and had no source of income, Meg recklessly spent money on foods and books as a means to suppress her worry about her financial situation. Having been raised by people who disregarded her emotional and material needs could be a possible cause of Meg's compulsive buying behaviors. Her mother, Meg recalls, was emotionally shut down and totally indifferent to her needs. As a child and a teenager, Meg never had decent clothes. At one point, Meg's deprivation of clothing led her to shoplifting. She did it with her girlfriend, who came from a well-to-do family but liked the thrill of shoplifting. It went on until Meg was 16 years old, and she finally stopped for fear of getting caught.

It was only a week after her son was born that Meg realized that she once again married to another alcoholic. This realization led to her joining Ala-Non, which was the first Twelve-Step program which she joined. After the divorce, Meg fell into a major depression, which was so severe that she was sent to a treatment center where she was diagnosed with depression and overeating. After she was released from treatment, Meg started going to other Twelve-Step programs such as Overeaters Anonymous, Alcoholic Anonymous, and Debtors Anonymous. Today, Meg still is active in various Twelve-Step programs, but it has been a slow and painful process, Meg says. After 14 years in recovery, Meg is still struggling to gain a more positive sense of self and find balance in the way she interacts with others. Nevertheless, she has become more health-conscious and more disciplined in her spending.

Growing up, Meg was not exposed to too much television. It was not until Meg was 11 years old that her parents bought a television set. Even then, Meg did not watch much television. She listened to some radio music. She did keep up with the news. Meg liked women's magazines. During her teenage years, Meg would look for fashion ideas from *Seventeen*. Meg has a passion for home decoration and craft, and she would watch for some ideas from the *Martha Stewart Living* show and the HGTV programs.

Informant 9: Barbara

Barbara, 42, is a member of Debtors Anonymous in St. Louis, Missouri. She has never been married. She was born and lived in Nevada until the age of two when her family moved to St. Louis. She has spent most of her life there. Barbara has an LPN and is now employed to do paperwork at a hospital. She says she does not particularly like her job but has to do it for the money. She used to practice nursing at one time, but quit to operate a pet-grooming shop. She sold the shop and was out of work for a year before coming back to work in a hospital again. Besides DA, Barbara is also a member of Overeaters Anonymous.

Unlike other compulsive buyers interviewed for the study, Barbara was born into a wealthy family. Her father was a successful physician; her mother quit her nursing career to become a full-time housewife. They have two daughters; Barbara is the younger child. Her father traveled extensively. They lived in a big house with a swimming pool. Barbara knew of no financial limitation in her family when she grew up. Nevertheless, Barbara's childhood is characterized by loneliness and depression, resulting from parental neglect. Everyone in the family was isolated from each other. Her father was a workaholic and loved to socialize. He rarely stayed home, and he was always involved with another women. He was "flamboyant, lewd, rude" as well as "demanding and childlike." He came home once a month and when he came, he was demanding. Her sister hated him. Barbara was afraid of his overarching power and did not want to be in his presence. Barbara and her sister, who is two years older, have never gotten along. When she was younger, Barbara was attacked by her sister on several occasions, and their parents did intervene. Today, the sisters do not talk to each other and have not seen each other for ten years. Barbara does not particularly care for her sister. Barbara's mother was devoid of human feelings. She did not show affection toward her children. She used drugs, and so did her father. Her parents fought. There was some yelling, but her parents never actually hit each other. Her parents endured the estranged relationship until Barbara was 16 when they finally divorced. Her mother remarried a man who was no better than her first husband. He died, and she lives by herself now.

Her father died shortly after he married another woman. Her father did not will anything to Barbara, her sister, or her mother.

Given her chaotic upbringing environment, it is natural that Barbara grew up feeling insecure. She had low self-esteem and was depressed throughout her childhood and most of her adulthood. The personality and emotional problems were so apparent to her that she felt like she needed counseling when she was only eight years old. Having a father who rarely came home and a mother who didn't show affection, coupled with a sister who verbally and physically abused her, Barbara has had a hard time trusting people. The relationships she had with her former boyfriends and friends, who are mostly women and gay, is what she describes as "superficial." Her mistrust of people increased as she was raped twice by her dates. Barbara has never had a career that she truly loves, and she is still looking for one. She received no guidance from her parents regarding her education. While her sister went on to college and received a Master's degree, Barbara did not see the significance of education. She had no education or career plan, but finally got herself an LPN. She practiced nursing in a hospital for four years and found that she hated being a nurse. She quit, and, at the age of 22, she started a private pet-grooming shop. She liked the job and earned about $60,000 a year. She sees her shop as a safe haven where she could work with harmless animals and hide away from strangers, especially after the rapes. After 15 years of owning the shop, she decided that she needed to grow and go back into the world again. She sold the shop and moved to Hawaii. She could not find employment there and was practically broke. She had to sell a lot of her jewelry she had acquired. Finally, she decided to go back to St. Louis and later found employment at the hospital. She does not like her job and is still looking for the possibility of working at a jewelry store.

Barbara loves buying jewelry. Although she will buy other things on impulse, she always loves jewelry. When she was a child, the only sign of love she received from her father was that he bought jewelry for her. At 16, she saved money from baby sitting and spent it on jewelry. From then on, she kept on buying jewelry, mostly from pawnshops where she could get the best deals. There were periods that she refrained from buying jewelry. After the rapes, Barbara felt she was safer by hanging out with female and gay

friends. She did not like to dress up, put on makeup, or wear anything nice. It was then that she refrained from buying jewelry. Nevertheless, she still loves and buys jewelry, even after the recovery in DA.

Besides jewelry, Barbara also turns to foods for emotional comfort. Consequently, she has an eating disorder. In fact, Barbara sees eating disorders as more of an issue in her life than compulsive buying. In trying to recover from an eating disorder, Barbara learned about the Twelve-Step programs. She was a member of Overeaters Anonymous before she was introduced to Debtors Anonymous. She has been in DA for two and a half years. She now has a monthly spending plan, but still overspends on jewelry. Through the long and painful process of recovery, Barbara now realizes that nothing will fulfill her except her faith in God and true friendships.

As a child, Barbara spent a lot of time in front of the television. Besides a dog and a cat, television was the only friend she had. She remembers watching a lot of sitcoms and commercials, and sometimes sang and imitated what was on TV. In the present, Barbara's exposure to the media is limited. She has refrained from watching TV during the past five years for fear of becoming addicted to it as she was previously.

Informant 10: Pat

Pat is 53. She lives and participates in Debtors Anonymous in St. Louis, Missouri. She has been divorced for more than ten years. She and her husband, who was in the military, have a 30-year-old daughter. Presently, her ex-husband and her daughter live in Washington State. Pat moved from Washington State to St. Louis after the divorce. After 32-years of marriage, Pat now enjoys living by herself in a rented apartment. She did not have any close relatives in town; both her mother and stepfather are now retired and live in Florida. She is looking forward to moving to Florida so that she can do more outdoor sports in a warmer climate. Pat's source of income is from military retirement as well as from teaching social skills and running motivational groups for a company that has programs for the disabled. She gets $450 dollars a month from her military retirement and earns about $18,000 a year. She is taking college courses and hopes to get a Bachelor's degree in adult education. Besides compulsive buying, Pat

always had a problem with an eating disorder and with being diabetic, plus she has a caffeine addiction.

Pat was born and raised in a small town in Missouri. She had two younger brothers. Her father was alcoholic and worked as a Holiday Inn manager. Her mother was a housewife. Pat's childhood would have been smoother had she not learned that her mother had divorced her biological father and remarried her husband's brother. She had three sons with him. Pat did not know that she was adopted until she read her baby book when she was 11 years old. After learning about the adoption, she no long felt she belonged in the family. She felt alienated especially from her stepfather and her brothers. Pat grew up having poor self-esteem, mostly as a result of the disappointment of learning that she was only a stepchild. But Pat's low self-esteem was also caused by other factors. One factor was her sexual abuse at the hands of by two babysitters when she was a child. Pat's low self-esteem was also caused by a lack of attention from her parents. Because her stepfather was alcoholic, he was so wrapped up in his own world that he was not able to develop an emotional bond with Pat, his own sons, or even his wife. He was verbally and emotionally abusive. Her mother did not show much affection to her children. Being dyslexic, and thus not being able to perform well in school, was another factor that contributed to Pat's low self-esteem.

After learning that she was adopted and feeling that she did not belong in the family, Pat saw that, as a way of returning her parents' favor for letting her be there, she needed to behave and to not cause any problems. However, as noted, Pat had many issues in her life that need to be resolved in order for her to have a healthy emotional life. Unfortunately, she did not deal with them nor did she have anybody to help her deal with them properly. Instead, in order to avoid dealing with those issues, Pat turned to shopping. Pat has always loved shopping since she was a child, and it has always been an escape from the problems with which she had to deal. Her mother described her as "someone who has a hole in the pocket." After Pat learned about the adoption, shopping "became a substitute for having a sense of belonging." Although Pat always had to deal with being overweight, she is an attractive person, and she loves dressing. She loves

buying clothes and coordinating them. She also loves home decoration. Thus, clothing, home decoration, and food have been the areas where Pat spends most of her money.

Besides having an unhappy childhood, Pat also had an unhappy marriage. During her marriage, her husband worked, and she was a housewife. As noted earlier, they had one daughter. Being in the military, they lived in several cities in the U.S., and finally they ended up in the state of Washington. There were conflicts in her marriage. One of the conflicts was over financial matters. Her husband is very responsible with money, while Pat is rather impulsive and vague about her spending habits. The other conflict, which was more serious, was that her husband was verbally, psychologically, and sexually abusive. Her husband, like Pat, grew up in an alcoholic home. However, he, unlike Pat, avoids addressing it or any emotional issues in his life. Pam used shopping as a way to escape from the reality of her unhappy marriage. Her shopping escalated right after her divorce. The divorce has allowed her for the first time to be on her own, and shopping is justified as a way of finding the meaning of self. After the divorce, she moved back to Missouri, and together with her emotionally abused mother, moved to and stayed at a shelter home for battered women for about a year. After leaving the shelter home, her mother moved back to her stepfather while Pat decided to stay in St. Louis. Her shopping escalated when she started living on her own in St. Louis. She went on shopping sprees for home decoration and clothing. That was about ten years ago. She overspent and eventually incurred a large debt that she still has to pay back.

As a child, Pat was sexually abused by two of her babysitters. However, when asked to compare the sexual abuse with the fact that she was adopted and the fact that she was in an unhappy marriage, Pat sees her unhappy marriage and her being adopted as more of an issue in her life.

Today, Pat is in recovery. As for overeating, she goes to Overeaters Anonymous. She has lost a lot of weight. She has been in DA for seven years. Nevertheless, she still loves shopping, especially for clothes since she has lost weight. She also seeks psychiatric therapy. Importantly, Pam came to the realization that it is crucial for a person to realize her individual value and to know what she wants to do in life. She tries

to apply this principle to her shopping by having a plan for what she wants to buy rather than buying something on impulse.

Being a dyslexic, she is not an avid reader. Her talent is seeing the coordination of colors and patterns. Growing up, Pat did not read many magazines or newspapers. Nevertheless, she loved to look through pictures in women's magazines. She loves movies, either at the theatre or on TV, especially those with human-interest themes. Having been through the financial problems and recovery process, Pat has become more cautious about being preyed upon by credit-card advertising.

Informant 11: Tina

Tina is 37 years old. She lives in St. Louis and attends DA meetings there. She has a 17-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son from her first marriage. She is now married to a man who is a manager of an auto-part shop. He has two teenage children from his previous marriage, and they spend half of their time with him and Tina. Tina has a Bachelor's degree in psychology and is working toward a Master's degree in Social Work. After graduation, she worked as a research specialist at a university, conducting drug trials for pharmaceutical companies. Presently, she enjoys working as an assistant to the editor of a scientific journal. Together, Tina and her husband earn approximately $65,000 a year. Besides being in DA, Tina is also a member of Overeaters Anonymous and Ala-Non.

Two main issues that trouble Tina's sense of self is her being overweight and her being ignored by her alcoholic and emotionally unstable mother. Tina was born and raised in a suburb of St. Louis. Her father ran an auto repair shop. Her mother quit her secretary job and became a full-time mom. Tina has one sister and one brother, and she is the youngest child. Although her father is a caring figure in her life, he was away a lot for work. Her mother drank regularly and became violent when she got drunk. She would carry on with scolding and yelling and crying. Sometimes, she would attack her husband and children. In order to keep herself safe from the attack, Tina tried to be invisible. She was very quiet, and she made sure that she did not do anything that would cause her mother to get upset. Tina's self-esteem has suffered the most from her mother's unequal attention to her and her sister. While Tina is an introvert, her sister is

more outgoing, sporty, self-confident, and assertive. And like her mother, she smoked and drank. Tina believes her sister's extrovert characteristics made her more interesting, and thus drew her mother's attention and affection. Although they had some fights, her mother was attentive to her sister's needs and wants. While her mother rarely spent money on Tina and her brother, she always bought things for her sister. Having been treated unequally by her mother, Tina was--and somewhat still is on a deeper level--craving for her mother's attention and approval. Tina was so desperate for the attention that one time she tried smoking in front of her mother, believing that she would pay attention. It was unsuccessful and, in return, was ridiculed by her mother. Given her upbringing, and perhaps the history of addiction and alcoholism, especially on her mother's side, Tina has developed low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety.

Like Tina, her mother suffers from obesity and has problems controlling her shopping. Unlike Tina, however, she managed to control her weight by starving herself. She spent a lot of money on clothes, which she rarely used. However, Tina did not shop much while she was living with her mother. She did not have the financial means to do it. Second, being overweight, Tina felt that she had no use for dressing up. Growing up, Tina did not have anyone in her family in whom she could confide. As noted, her father was away a lot and her mother was emotionally abusive. Although the relationship with her brother and sister was not hostile, it was not close. Tina's only outlet was her boyfriend, whom she met when she was in high school. After high school, she went to college, but soon decided to quit and marry her boyfriend after she found that she was pregnant. That was when she was 19 years old—three years after her father finally divorced her mother. Her father remarried and her mother moved away. As a couple, Tina took care of the household while taking some college courses, and her husband worked in construction to support the family. They had two children. Unfortunately, when she was in her mid-20s, her husband was seriously injured in a car accident. Tina decided to go back to school for fear that she would have to help provide for the family. Part of the preparation to be gainfully employed, as she saw it, was to lose weight—for the look as well as for the self-confidence. She religiously followed her diet plan, counted calories, and exercised. It was when she started losing weight that, for the first

time in her life, she felt motivated to dress up. She constantly shopped for clothes and accessories for herself. Although she did not get herself into debt buying clothes, she was very much consumed by shopping for them. Interestingly, after five years of keeping up with the rigid weight-loss plan, Tina developed anorexic symptoms. Although she was skinny, she was miserable. And unlike most people, Tina joined Overeaters Anonymous because she had lost too much weight.

When Tina was about to graduate, she and her husband decided to get a divorce. They, as Tina saw it, had grown apart, and they did not share the same interests. Tina got custody of the children and child support from her husband. Without a job, she went through financial difficulty after the divorce. Due to the financial burden, she became more careful in her spending and refrained from compulsive shopping. Also, as a single mother of two young children, Tina did not want to leave her children alone. After graduation, Tina got her present job and remarried. Although her new husband is diagnosed with manic-depression, the couple is reasonably content with their relationship. They get along fine with their stepchildren. However, Tina's pattern of compulsive shopping has resurfaced. Since she has gained weight and become overweight again, most of what she shops for are accessory items such as purses and costume jewelry. Although she does not spend a large sum of money on shopping, she is once again consumed by it. Shopping takes away too much time that she is supposed to spend with her family. Consequently, shopping has caused some problems in her relationship.

Although Tina has been in a Twelve-Step program for about two decades, she is rather new to DA. She has been in the program for about two years. She attends the DA meetings regularly, but still struggles on a daily basis with the urges to go shopping. When she is overwhelmed by the urges, Tina sometimes calls someone in DA in order to divert her attention. It may work at the moment, but the urge is still there, and very often she succumbs to the urge a few days later.

As for the pattern of media use, Tina was not any more exposed to the mass-mediated messages than the average child or teenager would be. She remembers watching some shows geared toward children such as *Lassie* and *Benji*. Her mother

hands catalogs and women's magazines around the house, but Tina does not remember ever paying much attention to those. Most of her time was spent playing with baby dolls. She had a boyfriend during her teenage years and spent more time being with him rather than tuning in to the media.

Informant 12: Jane

Jane, 52, lives in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She has never attended any Debtors Anonymous meeting, but her shopping habits indicate that she fits the profile of a compulsive buyer. Jane was born in a small town in Pennsylvania but spent most of her childhood in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has been married twice. She has one daughter with her first husband, whom she met, married, and divorced when she moved to San Francisco to be a Hippie. Jane decided to move to San Francisco when she was in her second year of college. Now her daughter is 30 years old and is married with three children. After divorcing her husband in San Francisco, Jane took her daughter back to Florida, worked part-time, and went back to school, trying to get a certificate for court reporter. After graduation, Jane worked as a court reporter in Florida. Then she married her second husband and moved to Hopkinsville. The marriage lasted only two years and she had one son with that husband. Her son is now 19 years old and is living with her.

Jane has worked as a court reporter for years, and because of its low pay, Jane has supplemented her income by being a psychic. However, in the past seven years, Jane has quit her court-reporter job and become a full-time psychic. With the special gift that she says runs in the family, she does faith healing and reading cards. She is also working toward a Bachelor's degree in psychology. Jane does not reveal her income level, but says that she is doing okay with what she makes.

Jane loves collecting trinkets, especially dolls and ornaments for seasonal decoration. Once she gets a piece of anything, she has to have more of it. Yard sales and markdown merchandise are irresistible to her. She has a huge collection of man-made animal figures, hundreds of teddy bears, and a Christmas tree, fully decorated, in every room in her house all year round. The compulsion to collect things, she says, is an addiction that runs in her family. Her grandmother collected buttons, her father books,

and one of her brothers collects model cars. Now her son collects action figures; her daughter collects kitchen gadgets, and her grandchildren all collect something.

Besides the compulsion to collect, Jane says that depression is another disease that runs in her family. Everybody in her own family as well as the family she grew up with suffers from depression. The cause of it could be biological as much as environmental. In the family in which she grew up, her father, who himself was raised in an abusive family, contributed to much of the physical and emotional pain experienced by her mother, Jane, and her three brothers—one older and two younger. With her father working as a mailman, and both her parents running two motels, Jane and her brothers were left to take care of themselves. Jane herself had to be "a mother" to her younger brothers. Her father did not drink everyday, but once he got drunk he became violent. Sometimes he would attack his wife, and most of the time he would whip his children with a big belt for their wrongdoing. Her mother, as Jane and her brother see it, did nothing to protect them from their father. Consequently, not only did Jane and her brothers felt alienated from their father because of his coldness and cruelty, but they also had a deep-seated anger toward their mother's passivity. Jane tells the story of her eldest brother who, in spite of his achievement as a renowned agriculture professor, committed suicide in his parents' house on a family-gathering occasion by hanging himself in the garage. Jane realized then that her brother chose to take his life in that very location because he wanted his mother to know the consequences of his father's meanness and her passivity.

Besides being abusive, her father also had a very traditional view on gender roles. His view has particularly affected Jane's self-perception. He believed that a woman's place was at home, and thus it was pointless to send a girl to school. Thus, while he paid for her brothers' college education, he, in spite of his sufficient funds, did nothing to help her when she decided to go to college. Jane worked odd jobs to pay her way and her tuition. Ironically, one of the reasons that she continued her education is because she believed that she could impress her father by acquiring education, the thing highly esteemed by her father. Although Jane has not reached the academic achievement her brother has, she keeps on going back to school until this day.

A crucial factor that Jane believes has contributed to her compulsion to keep acquiring things is her parents' extreme frugality toward their children's material needs. Growing up in the Depression era, her parents were very frugal. Because he parents owned two motels and her father worked as a mail deliverer, her parents were not poor. Nevertheless, Jane could not recall that her parents ever gave her or her brother many toys with which to play. Since she was young, Jane worked odd jobs so that she could have extra money for the things she wanted. She, like her brothers, felt deprived, which in turn left her with an insatiable desire for things, especially trinkets and toys.

In the present, Jane still has problems controlling her buying impulses. She has realized that she is particularly vulnerable when she has credit cards and receives newspaper inserts. Looking through the inserts with marked-down merchandise will send her right to the stores. Her inability to control shopping has been obvious to her son who occasionally asks her to stop buying any more things. She has had times when she could not pay the mortgage and bills because of her uncontrolled buying. When her son was very young, which was about 19 years ago, she incurred some credit-card debt that she could not pay back. That predicament was a wake-up call. Now she tries to curb her buying impulses by not using credit cards and by canceling her newspaper subscription.

Although Jane did not grow up watching much television, mass media have played significant roles in her life. She uses the mass media as a source of advice on what to wear and on how people interact. She reads women's magazines such as *Modern Bride*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Cosmopolitan* for fashion ads as well as human-relation advice. Besides keeping up with the news, she used to read the Ann Lander's and Dear Abbey columns in the newspapers. She is also a fan of Dr. Laura's radio talk show. Jane also has first-hand experience being on the other side of the mass-media business. In San Francisco, she sold and wrote for newspapers, magazines, and Yellow Pages ads. By working in advertising, Jane has acquired some ideas about the kind of subliminal

Four Types of Compulsive Buyers

It is true that every informant, like any compulsive buyer, has low self-esteem, especially at an earlier time in her life. There are differences, however, as to why each of

these informants develops a rather negative attitude toward herself. For these twelve informants, there appear to be four distinctive patterns as to how they develop negative perceptions about themselves. The root of these distinctions seems to lie in the informants' upbringings. Based on these distinctive patterns, each informant is identified as one of these four types of compulsive buyers: the Provider, the Striver, the Abused, and the Neglected. In this section, the discussion of the patterns of upbringing, shopping and buying behavior, and self-perception is presented.

The Provider

Self and Upbringing

Compulsive buyers who see themselves as a "Provider" measure their self-worth based on their ability to provide for others. Having experienced the pain of growing up in poverty-stricken environments, the Provider strives to assure that their loved ones do not experience the same feelings of material scarcity. They get "high" out of buying things for others while neglecting their own needs. Pam and Dorothy exhibit the characteristics of the Provider just described.

Pam experienced economical limitations at a very young age. She was raised by a single parent—a mother who also had six other children to bring up all by herself. Pam has managed through the hardship to become a productive member of the society. She worked hard to pursue a career. She is now content with her career and has substantial income from her job. For Pam, the defining factor of her sense of self is the fact that she had to endure economic hardship at a very young age. Knowing the pain of facing material scarcity, she seeks assurance that she has plenty of resource to shield her children from the hardship. Nevertheless, before recovery she experienced occasions of self-doubt and has been through periods of depression. Although she is generally attentive to her work, she quit her part-time job at one point while she was in New York because of her self-doubt and depression. She recalls:

> I went from one extreme to the other. I would be in the low of low and then I would be in the high of work. I would be in the low of low and then I would be in the high of work. So, when I talk about being out of energy, I don't feel as much. I don't hardly do it at all now. Back in my days, before my recovery, there was time after I have my children that I couldn't get off the couch, and I would call in either sick or.... I had to quit my job at one point. I was so

> bad. I quit my job and I was out of work for six months, because I was so sick…from the insanity, the depression.

Due to the depression, Pam quit her job and was out of work for six months. She was sent to a rehabilitation center and was diagnosed with manic-depression. Although it is quite possible that her mental health has genetic explanations, what went on in her mind that contributed to her feeling worthless about herself was the "fear of economic insecurity." When asked why she did not feel like going to work then, she says:

> I was feeling that I was not gonna make it, economically. Fear of economic insecurity. I wasn't drinking. I had two children. Two small children. My husband was working, but I didn't feel good enough about myself to get out of the couch to go to work.

Pam's fear of economic insecurity is understandable, given the fact that she saw her father leave her mother with seven children. She mentions her fear of having to be in her mother's position when her father left. She attributes her falling into severe depression as the consequence of the pain she has experienced in her childhood. She says:

> That was one of my issue back to my childhood, and the pain that I went through, the trauma, and.… I too wanted to give up my marriage at one point. I was ready to shut it all in, and my husband stick with me. It was a trying time, you know. And I got to a point when I had to go to a Codependence Anonymous. I was part of.…I was addicted to my husband. I was afraid that he was gonna leave. I was afraid that he was gonna loose his job, and I would have to support family…the same pattern that my mother had.

Dorothy is the other informant in the Provider category. Dorothy, like Pam, grew up in a low-income family. Her father was abusive, psychologically, physically, and sexually, to his wife and his children. Her mother was caring but was helpless against her husband's behavior. Her father did sexually abuse one of Dorothy's younger sisters. Dorothy experienced physical abuse from her father. He also habitually said negative things about Dorothy. Household chaos and poverty were the main issues in her upbringing. "Unstable" was the word she used to describe her parents. She described her household as follows: "There was so much chaos and…un…, there was a lot of…anger or a lot of silence." Dorothy, however, does not belong to the Abused category for these

reasons. First, the abuse from her father was not constantly directed toward her alone. Everyone in her family had to endure the abuse. Second, she, unlike the informants in the Abuse category, had a strong determination at a very young age to get help for herself, for her younger siblings, and even for her mother. At the age of 16, she was granted, at her request, by the court to be removed from her parents' supervision. Her action inspired her mother to get a divorce from her husband.

Given her parents' limited income and her father's career insecurity, Dorothy experienced at a very young age economical limitations. Shopping for anything beyond her family's basic needs was not something her family could afford.

> I. OK. How did you learn to shop?
> R. You know, that's a good question because I didn't...I don't remember...really doing much shopping as I was growing up. It wasn't until.... Because we never really have any money, and there wasn't no.... It's not like there is a weekly shopping trip, you know, regular shopping for grocery or anything. And...um...we were deprived a lot, but when I was a teenager,...and...um.... I was independent by the time I was about...seventeen, so I just...I just learned to do it on my own, I guess you could say. When I needed something, I would just go get it. I remember shopping for food and taking it to my family, you know, after I've grown up

The poverty and the chaos in the family contributed to Dorothy's tendency to isolate from her peers. There seems to be a dichotomy in Dorothy's sense of self. She used the term "elusive" to describe herself. On the one hand, she sees herself as an honest and accountable person. On the other hand, she is susceptible to feeling negative about herself. Criticisms from others as well as financial insecurity are the mains triggers for her negative attitudes toward herself. On the positive side, Dorothy sees herself as having "resilience" and loving to help other people, sometimes to the extreme of protecting them from experiencing any hardships. This aspect of her personality is similar to that of Pam. Her resilience is evident in her ability to endure hardships and her ability to make impressive progress in her career, even without a college degree. She has worked as a manager for various businesses and has earned an impressive income from working at a real estate company. While she was still married, she provided the main source of income for the family. Her tendency to help others, especially her ex-husband

and her children, however, is sometimes excessive. She now sees her tendency to let her loved ones rely on her as a form of codependency.

> I. Psychologically...how you see yourself?
> R. Oh. Psychologically,...I would say...resilient. (Laugh.)
> I. Resilient!? What do you mean?
> R. Um...I handle...adversity well. I'm...um...strong...emotionally, and yet I'm very sensitive. Um...I...I'm very loving and caring, compassionate—I don't know if these are psychological term; these are the quality...that I believe...pertain to me. Um...I'm...enterprising, resourceful. Um...I tend to...take care of others....
> I. What do you mean by that?
> R. Um...codependent—probably a good psychological word.
> I. You mean someone codependent on you, or you codependent on them--what do you mean...?
> R. I mean...I—like my husband was a drug addict, and I tended to...take care of him. And...my children, I always...want to save them from adversity because I very much experienced it in my childhood...and my marriage, and...and I have always...tried to...prevent them...um...from having painful experiences...to the point that's probably not healthy for them. That's what I mean by codependence.

Compulsive Buying Behavior

There are three major aspects to the Provider's compulsive buying. First, the Provider does not generally buy for a reason of vanity. That is, what they buy during the compulsive buying episodes tend be food and merchandise for household use. Secondly, they tend to buy things for other people. Finally, the compulsive buying tends to escalate during a time of economic insecurity. Pam and Dorothy's compulsive buying has these aspects. Pam's pattern of compulsive buying is a reflection of the way she sees herself. Recall that in the previous discussion, Pam's sense of self is characterized by her lack of self-esteem and her fear of economic insecurity, resulting from the material scarcity she experienced in her childhood. Unlike typical compulsive buyers, Pam rarely bought anything for herself during her compulsive-buying episodes. She bought clothes, candies, and toys for her children. She would "buy stuff for other kids, and send it in the mail" to her extended set of relatives in New York. Indeed, an obsession with buying things for others was so great that in recovery her shopping has changed:

> Today I shop definitely differently. Today, I would go out by myself. Back then, even when I go out by myself, I would shop for other people when I was by myself. I would shop for my children even I go by myself. Today, I shop

> for myself when I' m with myself...my clothes or certain foods that I like or healthy foods, and I shop just for myself.

However, once she no longer bought things for other people as much as she used to, Pam found that "they didn't care. They didn't say anything...nothing. Nobody even noticed. They just don't get it." Although the recipients of her gifts might not understand why she kept giving them things, Pam seems to know the reason for her behavior. It is her desire to win her children "as well as her relatives' affection." When she bought things for her children, Pam says: "I would feel high. You will feel like, 'Oh, here you go, this is great.' You know, I wish that they would love me because I gave them all these." When asked why she had to buy things for her relatives, Pam says: "Because I thought they would...like me. I can buy their love like I did my children." Pam's pattern of buying things for others in a way is a reflection of how she values herself. It could be that she did not have enough sense of self-worth to realize that she is worthwhile as a human being without having to be loved by others to prove it, or that she is capable of caring for others without having to use things to show it.

Pam sees herself as a "grocery-aholic." She says: "I would take all the groceries and hoard all the groceries so that my children gonna have enough to eat." Given her family background, it is not surprising as to why she did so. Pam recalls her childhood experience:

> Sometimes we didn't have enough to eat. Well, we have potato on the stove every night, but we didn't have a time when we didn't really anything to eat. In the house, we have peanut butter and jelly—American standard, you know. I lived on peanut butter and jelly for quite a few years. So, when I grew up and I had my own family, I always...I hoard the grocery, because I always...I had to make sure that there is enough peanut and jelly for everybody, to have enough bread, you know. My refrigerator will be overstocked and I have to throw all the stuffs out before I even use it...before it goes bad...I mean.

Pam's descriptions of her buying episodes reflect the characteristics of obsessive-compulsive behavior. First, Pam shopped as a way to escape the anxiety caused by the feelings that she is worthless and the fear that she could not provide for her children. Her husband was the main source of income for the family when her shopping escalated. She was afraid that her husband would either lose his job or leave her with the children.

Shopping became a temporary relief from the pain and anxiety. When asked what she enjoyed doing most then, Pam says: "There was noting you could do. There was very little that I enjoy. I was so depressed and the life was so hard." She says shopping "will take away some of the pain, but the shopping was only...um...curb it for a little while, you know. You have to bring all the stuff home and you have to unload it all, put it all away, cooking for them all, so it was like you're constantly taking care of somebody."

Moreover, Pam's shopping had an element of uncontrollability and obsessive thinking. She says:

> I'm a compulsive shopper because I bought, bought, bought, bought. I bought a lot of stuffs. It has only been last three years in my recovery that I don't have a desire to shop like I used to.... I was shopping a lot back then. It was bad then, because all I can think of was how I am going to shop more and more. I was a grocery-aholic....I am a big huge grocery shopper, spending at least twenty...thirty dollars a day."

In Pam's case, shopping is a sign of an individual's avoidance to confront squarely the obstacles and uncertainty. Pam's shopping escalated when she was under the pressure of having to actually provide for her two children. Her pressure was to provide for them and in a way that assured that her children did not have to experience the material scarcity she had gone through. In addition, the memory of her father leaving her mother with the children might have caused her to worry that she would experience that loss also. In addition, with the recession of the early 1990s, she was also under the pressure of losing her job and being forced to move to a new location.

Like Pam, Dorothy's shopping tends to escalate during the time when she feels a threat to her economic security. During such time, she shops for groceries and household items to assure that she will have them when she does not have any money left. Dorothy does shop for clothes, especially during the past few months, as a means to enhance her self-confidence to pursue job interviews. About a month prior to the interview, Dorothy had embarked on a new career as a real estate agent. Several months before that, she was unemployed and was looking for employment. She lived on credit cards. In those months, she shopped extensively with credit cards for clothes as well as food and household merchandise.

I. So, you go to DA because—not because you have shopping problem!?
R. Yes, it is. Here is the thing. I—throughout my life, I have...um..., you know, I have always worked very hard and...make enough money to support my children, but I never learn about spending plan or..., you know. And my parents were...were poverty-stricken when I was a kid, so I have never learned...how to handle money, how to manage money and...um.... So I'm here ended up...forty some years old with no money in the bank. I...I bought a condo about two years ago...for the first time, you know, I bought a very small two-bedroom condo. But...um...when I lost my job, I—my self-esteem is connected to my work. If I'm doing well at work, then my self-esteem is okay. But if I have problem or if I loose my job, especially when it's not...within my control—when...when I was laid off from my job, in stead of going out and getting another job, I felt really...low self-esteem. I felt...just like when my husband used to tell me I was, or when my father...would say...really...degrading things...when I was a little girl—basically meant "You are no good." So when I lost my job—there was no fault of my own, I took it...to mean...there was something wrong with me and I was no good, and my self-esteem plummeted. And instead of going and getting another job, I didn't feel worthy...to go earn money. So...I would go—sometimes I would go and spend a thousand dollars...on a shopping spree...to make myself feel better.
I. OK. Is that often?
R. Um...for several months, it was.
I. You mean...your...your shopping spree can last several months.
R. Yes.
I. OK. Can you tell me more about that?
R. Well, for eight months...I lived off credit cards. I went...thirty-two thousand dollars into debt. I didn't earn any money. And...I would go, you know—I would spend a thousand dollars on clothes or a thousand dollars to fix up my house or...a hundred dollars on plants, and...I would go to the movies and...out to eat with my friends, when I was unemployed. You know, I...wasn't looking for a job,...and I didn't feel...good enough to look for a job, but I would feel better and go into debt. I feel better at first. It was like...um...it was like a...almost like drinking or...using drugs—something that temporarily feels good, but...the consequences are...great and painful...because one day I realize.... Well, while I was doing it, I realized it...that I was digging myself into...financial hole...and...um...not able to...get out of it, and...right not, today—today, this very day, my house payment is three-month...unpaid. I have not paid.

Besides the intensity of shopping during periods of economic insecurity, Dorothy's compulsive buying resembles that of Pam's in her tendency to buy things for others, especially her children. Her children are now grown and have started their own families. She does not buy for them as she used to, but she regrets the fact that she has showered them with clothes and toys and, consequently, has made compulsive buyers out

of her children. In the following interview excerpt, she discusses how her tendency to buy things for her children is linked to her desire to shield them from experiencing the material limitations she grew up with.

> R. ....And...um...also I like to buy things for other people, and my daughter does that too. She spends lots of money—and my son too. He gives away a lot.
> I. OK. How would that make you feel to buy things and give away to people—why do you do that?
> R. I love it. I just do.
> I. Which part that you love? I mean why...why...?
> R. I...I don't know. I just like...giving and seeing somebody feel good. It feels good to me to make somebody feel good and get something that they need or want. And...and maybe I've never got that kind of stuffs when I was a child, you know, not until...adult—there were lots and lots of time that...I was deprived. So when things are going well...for me, I...I always want to give...because I don't want anybody else to feel deprived.

<u>The Striver</u>

Self and Upbringing

The word "Striver" is used here to distinguish a certain type of compulsive buyers--based on their worldviews, their upbringing environments, and their shopping behaviors--from the other three types of compulsive buyers discussed in the previous sections. In this study, Mary, Rita, Jan, and Debra are the four informants who are identified as the "Strivers." The findings regarding the Strivers' worldviews and how their worldviews are related to their upbringing environments are discussed in this section. Their shopping behaviors as well as the life situations in which the escalation of shopping occurs will be discussed in the following sections.

The Strivers' specific worldviews regarding what constitutes a happy life are of interest here. It was found that the five informants identified as the Strivers seem to subscribe to the idea that material things and worldly achievement are the prerequisites for their happiness. When asked to describe their "ideal image of happiness," Mary, Rita, and Jan give similar descriptions of what they view as a happy life. Based on these women's descriptions, what it means to be happy, in short, is to live in a big house, to own at least one luxury car, to have a loving relationship with a successful husband, to have a child who never causes any problem, to have an outstanding career, to go on

expensive vacations, and to be affiliated with rich and successful people. Debra does not give a similar list of what would make her happy. However, her idea of happiness, like those of Mary, Rita, and Jan is also based on material things. Debra says happiness is to have an "infinite supply" of everything. Then she elaborates that if she can buy anything she can think of, and any time she can think of it, she will be happy.

Because of their increased maturity, their continuing recovery from compulsive buying, and their experience of the financial and emotional consequences of their behaviors, there have been changes in the way some of these informants view happiness. Of the twelve informants, Rita, who has been in Debtor Anonymous (DA) for only 18 months, has exhibited impressive changes in her shopping behaviors as well as the way she views herself and her happiness. Rita quit using credit cards right after attending a few DA meeting. Not only has she not used credit cards from then on, but she has also refrained from compulsive buying. Her being more mature, her experience of seeing some affluent and successful people she has worked with, and, more importantly, her 18-month fellowship in Debtor Anonymous, have led her to the conviction that it is not the external sources such as the "Prince Charming," the amount of money she has, or the things she buys, but the way she perceives and reacts to life circumstances as well as her faith in the "Higher Power" that determine her happiness. The other three Strivers, Mary, Jan, and Debra, like Dorothy, Meg, Brenda, Pat, Barbara, Tina, and Jane, seem to have come to the realization that material things will not bring happiness. Unlike Rita, however, these informants have not exhibited the behavioral changes that are clearly driven from this realization. Although it is true that they have refrained from compulsive buying, it is not clear whether their behavioral changes are the reflection of this realization or the limitation of their financial resources.

The Strivers' descriptions of a happy life may not sound too foreign to some people who are not a compulsive buyer. However, the informants identified as the Strivers in this study seem to have a distinctively deep-seated sense of lacking. This sense of lacking is described differently by different individual informants. However, each informant seems to share a common assumption that she is not a complete person in her own right. Each seems to have constantly felt compelled to prove to other people that

she is worthy of their acceptance because she possesses certain thing(s), and/ or qualities. Furthermore, it seems that the Strivers have formed an ideal image of the person who would be accepted or even respected in the social circle they are in. They constantly compare themselves against that ideal image and are constantly aware they do not fit that ideal image. They, in turn, believe that they are not part of the mainstream of that certain social circle to which they aspire.

As noted, the sense of lacking is reported differently by each informant. For years, Rita used to feel that she was "different" from others because she grew up poor, was married to an alcoholic, and did not have enough money to shop like other people did. But Rita not only thought that she was different from others, she also saw that there was the "elite group" who were successful people who could afford to shop at the upscale malls. Rita grew up believing that she was not a worthy person because she could not see herself belonging to the "elite group," and she eventually resorted to shopping as a way to fit in. One of her favorite stores is Macy's. Shopping there, she says, has made her feel "like the elite group."

While Rita's sense of lacking was predominantly reflected in her feeling of being differentiated from the elite, Mary's sense of lacking has been reflected in her perpetual sense of scarcity. She fears that she will not have enough of the things she might need when she needs them. Her sense of scarcity is revealed in the following interview excerpt.

> I. OK. When did you realize that your shopping become excessive?
> R. Well, I didn't know it was excessive until...I mean until I'm in my...mid-thirties. I didn't know it, and then I looked back and saw that it had been a problem but didn't realize at the time. So I mean I guess it was...became kind of...excessive like maybe in my late 20s.
> I. So you realized that after you are already in DA, right?
> R. Ah-ha.
> I. OK. How would your shopping become very excessive then?
> R. Um...I mean it didn't happen all of a sudden. It's pattern all my life. It's the scarcity thinking. It's the scarcity in that I'm afraid I don't have enough. It's the thinking that these material things are gonna bring me happy, and I guess in my late 20s I only had enough money to shop more, you know. That was...that was the reason that I was shopping more—because I had money...for the first time in my life.

Mary's sense of scarcity is not surprising, given her experiences of economic insecurity at an earlier time in her life. Mary did not grow up in a poverty-stricken family, for her father could afford to buy her a used car when she was 16 years old. However, she still had to work as a waitress to pay for college expenses. Having to work a lot in her college years and her preference of spending time either alone or with her then boyfriend rather than with her college peers, Mary felt she was not a part of the mainstream college experience. Mary's sense of lacking is perhaps better reflected in the following interview excerpt. Here, Mary says she wishes she had more household income so that she would be able to do more home decoration. She has few close friends in town but would like to socialize with people with higher socio-economic status. Although Mary does have a nice home with some decent furniture in it, she still feels she is not ready to invite those people to her house. Mary's wish seems to reflect her belief that what she is and what she has now is not good enough to reach out to those with whom she wants to socialize.

I. OK. Um...what would you do if you have one hundred thousand a year? What would you do the things that you cannot do now?
R. Um...I could furnish our home. Um...I could...I could have nicer clothes. I wouldn't have...you know...every month...I wouldn't have to restrain my budget much. Right now, I am always about...somewhere between two to three hundreds dollars short every month that I do the budget.
I. Now, you mean the budget for the household things, Right?
R. No...no. My husband gives me a certain amount of money that is mine. That is for--he pays the bills. That is for something...everything else is mine...you know. Things for my daughter...um...things for the house.
I. OK.
R. The other things I would like to do is—I would have a nicer car, and my daughter would be enrolled in better school. Also, I would like to...um...to have more parties.
I. Parties?
R. Yeah. Like...invite people, friends to our home. Right now, I feel like...like I don't have many friends. So, if I can...have more money, then we can invite them. I enjoy talking, spending times with people...you know, but right now we can't do that much.
I. So, do you have a lot of friends?
R. No...not really. I probably have two or three real friends.
I. So, the people that you would like to invite to the party are not really friends?

R. No, but I would like to get to know them better. The people that I would like to know more about...they are...they have higher economic status, and I...I feel like I wouldn't want to invite them to our house right now.

The other informant in this category is Jan. Jan grew up in a low-income family. She had lost both of her parents by the time she was 16 years old. She then stayed with a grandmother who relied on Social Security and Welfare subsidies. Nevertheless, her sense of lacking, unlike that of Rita and Mary, has more to do with her being overweight rather than with economic insecurity. Like all of the informants except Rita and Mary, her problem with compulsive buying is accompanied by binge eating. She did not indulge herself with shopping as much as with food while she was growing up. Her favorite pastime was either eating out with her friends or staying home cooking and eating with her grandmother. Therefore, while Jan could temporarily have low self-esteem when she encounters periods of financial difficulties, her life-long struggle has been with being overweight. Besides the perception of her physical appearance, Jan's tendency to compare herself with others, especially in terms of the kinds and the amount of material things they have, may be another factor contributing to her sense of lacking.

Debra, the other compulsive buyer in the Striver category, seems to have experienced a unique challenge in her formation of the sense of self, given her physical limitation. Debra lost her eyesight when she was three years old. During the course of the interview, however, Debra never directly addressed blindness as an obstacle to her life. Nevertheless, as Debra went on to recount some of her growing-up as well as employment-related experiences, one can see that being blind inevitably subjects her to a unique living condition. By attempting to deal with this condition, being blind has contributed to how she sees herself as well as her purposes in life. When asked to describe herself, Debra says, "There is a dichotomy in my life. There is a…there is a difference between who I am and who I appear to be or who I want to be or who I want to appear to be, who I think I am, or who I fear I might be." In the following interview excerpt, she describes what she means by the "dichotomy" in her life.

I: Who do you think you are?

R: I think I'm rather immature in a lot of aspects. I'm impulsive about the money that I spend and wanting to impress another people that…I have more

money than I do. So, I spend beyond my mean, and then I'm worried about it. And...uh...who I want to appear to be is a person with...an unlimited supply, and...I...I guess my greatest fear is that people will think that I'm in someway...not enough or someway inadequate. Uh...there's a real...real drive that I have to appear to be...all thinks to all people all time. And...uh...I like...I like to...uh...buy things that I shouldn't buying. It's not that I get things that I shouldn't have, but I...get things at the wrong time. I have been known to...you know...spend part of the rent and think, "Well, I'll just pay a little bit late and it will be okay." I mean I can do that. And...uh...I have a history of writing bad checks, and...I'm a lawyer. That's scary. I know better than that. I represent people who do that, and I try to keep that a great secret, which is hard to do. When you bounce the checks, at least the person that you give the check to knows that there is a problem.

I: What do you really want if you are that way? I mean why would you want to be...you know...all that kind of thing for them?

R: I like the...praise that I get, excitement of doing it...for having people think that I'm really Super Woman...really great...or something or another. I don't know—it's just...a long-standing habit.

Debra's practice of spending beyond her means in order to impress other people that she is a "Super Woman" definitely qualifies her as a Striver in this study. In the following excerpt, Debra describes how her drive to impress others got started. It was when she was eight years old and had just begun first grade. Given the age difference, and perhaps her apparent physical limitation, she was eager to fit in with the other students.

I: Do you remember when did that (the need to be all thing to all people) start?

R: Well, it started in childhood. Uh...I guess I didn't start school until everybody else did. I was ...eight years old when I went to public school. I went to kindergarten when I was six. I should have started since I was six years old and I couldn't find school. My parents couldn't find the school that would take...blind child, and...so I was eight years old when I started in school. And...I think I wanted to have...friends and...to be accepted, so I...sort of became...the child who always shared her lunch money, the child who would...you know...do things...help in anyway. I want to be good. I wanted to be right. I wanted to be...an angel. And...I had problem at home, so I had to...kind of throw myself into school, into my friends there...a lot.

Besides striving to impress others with seemingly unlimited economical resources, Debra has also devoted her life to intellectual pursues. As she suggests in the above interview, school was a safe haven from the problems she had at home. As noted

in the Informant Description section of this chapter, these problems essentially involved her parents' verbal and physical attack on one another, especially when her father was drunk. Getting fully involved in school as well as having friends there was thus an escape from the tumultuous household environment. Her experiences at school indicate that she was a very competitive student, and that being on top of the competition was extremely important for her self-esteem. One time, she was extremely disappointed to learn that, after having done all she could, her final score from a Spanish literature class was not the highest in the class. This experience was so revealing of her competitive nature because she did receive an A from the class, and, more importantly, the other two students she was competing against were the native speakers of Spanish. Although there was some dysfunctional component of her intellectual pursuits, it is undeniable that Debra has achieved much of what she has been going after. Some of her intellectual accomplishments are two degrees in Spanish, a law degree, her knowledge about every literary work by Williams Shakespeare, and her ability to speak six languages besides English. Even after her schooling years, intellectual pursuits have been an integral part of her life. She is now learning Chinese from a private tutor and is actively keeping up with current events in the news. Her insatiable desire to learn new things is also reflected in her shopping. She shops for and constantly seeks information on novelty items, especially exotic foods, kitchen utensils, computer-related products, and devices that help the blind function more efficiently.

There is a possibility that Debra's striving behaviors have been propelled, at least partially, by her motivation to prove to others her self worth, which is based on her possession of an unlimited supply of everything and on her intellectual ability in spite of her blindness. Her being blind, however, might not be her only driving force. The household environment in which she grew up also drives her to be fully involved in school. The role of the household environment in shaping Debra's as well as the other three Strivers' worldview and behaviors will be discussed in this section. But before such discussion is presented, it is important to address how the Strivers see themselves in terms of their self-esteem. That way, one can see a complete picture of what it means to be a Striver.

It has been well established in the literature that compulsive buyers generally have low self-esteem. The four informants in the Striver category, like the ones in the other three categories, are no exception to this fundamental truth. However, there seem to be two manners in which these four informants show their low self-esteem. For Jan and Debra, their self-esteem fluctuates according to their life circumstances. Rita and Mary still have issues with self-esteem for prolonged periods of time. It is not the purpose of this study to examine the link between bio-psychological factors and self-esteem, but it is noteworthy that Jan and Debra's personalities are more upbeat than Rita and Mary's personalities. It is noteworthy, however, that maturity and recovery have practically brought Rita's prolonged experience of having low self-esteem to an end. She now seems to be a very cheerful and optimistic person.

The four informants in the Striver category have low self-esteem. However, an analysis of the interview transcripts reveals that there are differences across the informants in terms of the manner in which their low self-esteem is manifested. Two informants generally have low self-esteem, especially when they were younger and less advanced in their recovery from compulsive buying. The other two informants, whose personalities are bubblier, tend to feel bad about themselves when they are confronted with identifiable problems. More importantly, if low self-esteem is a psychological construct, there are differences across the informants in terms of meanings behind this construct. In other words, each informant's psychological symptom of low self-esteem has personal meanings, which involve the way she sees herself and what would make her happy. The underlying meanings behind the informants' low self-esteem have been noted in the previous sections. In the case of the Strivers discussed here, these meanings are boiled down to the belief that they are inadequate as individuals because they have been deprived of certain things they believe would make them a happy person. Feeling that they are different from others, the Striver tends to isolate. The Strivers are "striving" in a sense that they feel compelled to prove to other people as well as to themselves that they are worthy as a person. Trying to impress others and to convince themselves that they "belong" to a certain social class, they spend beyond their means.

Given the Strivers' worldview, it appears that their driven behaviors are the product of economical deprivation they have experienced at an earlier time in their life. One can easily argue that there have been countless people who grew up deprived of a lot of things they need, and yet they do not turn out to be compulsive buyers. The explanation as to why the Strivers turn out to be different from these people may lie in the way the Strivers were brought up or the kind of things they were exposed to at an earlier time in their life. In the next discussion, we will address what kind of household and social environment in which each striver was raised. The findings that will be discussed will show that the "Striver" informants have been brought up with the combination of material deprivation, a lack of orientation to financial discipline, and a lack of emotional nourishment from the parenting figures in their life. Besides being brought up with a sense of deprivation, these informants were also exposed to the situations in which they acquire the idea that material things are the source of happiness and self-validation. This synopsis of the Strivers' background is best illustrated in Rita's story.

Rita grew up in a low-income family. Her parents provided for her basic needs, but they could not afford to give her much of anything else. Her clothes and toys were handed down from relatives. Besides a lack of material things, Rita attributes her poor sense of self to the perception that her parents, who rarely expressed affection toward their children, did not love her. Rita says one of her problems before her recovery was that she always wanted "to be like everybody else." But her parents' emotional inhibition was not the only reason she was not close to them when she was growing up. Her father was very strict with her and her brother, and her mother simply played a role of a passive housewife. Consequently, there existed very little emotional bond between her and her parents when she was growing up. Given her sensitive nature, Rita took the material deprivation and the lack of affection from her parents to mean that she was not as good as everybody else. Her sense of inferiority was accentuated when she was exposed to the various situations in which the differences between people from different social classes were displayed. At the Catholic school where she went and at the church where her family attended, Rita observed that there was the "elite group" and that the people who

belonged to this group were different from her family. Besides her first-hand experiences at the school and the church, Rita also observed from the "television and the movies" the difference between "people who had money and people who didn't." However, according to Rita, her first-hand experience "had more of an impact than the movies."

The other informant whose growing-up experience is similar to that of Rita is Jan. Jan did not have strict parents as Rita did, but she, like Rita, came from a low-income family with no incidence of domestic abuse. She does not have much recollection of her father and mother. She lost her father to a car accident when she was three years old and her mother to respiratory disease when she was 16 years old. After her mother died, Jan stayed with her grandmother, who was then 65 years old. Jan and her grandmother lived on Social Security and Welfare subsidiaries. Jan and her grandmother were close, but then, like Rita, she was exposed to the world outside the one she lived with her grandmother. It was in this external world that Jan, like Rita, observed that there were differences between what she and her grandmother had and what other people had. Although Jan does not mention in the interview any specific incidence in which she has been put down by someone like Rita does, she does report her tendency to compare herself to others, to be envious of what they have.

In short, Rita and Jan observed from the sources outside their families the socio-economical inequality between themselves and others. It is especially clear in Rita's case that her observation has left her with a sense of lacking, which in turn leads to her striving mentality. Debra and Mary, on the other hand, were raised by parents who habitually mentioned to them the significance of material wealth and status image. Mary, for example, remembers her mother making comments about the size and the appearance of people's houses. Similarly, Debra has a mother who paid her for every household chore she did. Furthermore, she, like Mary's mother, often made a remark about the size of other people's houses. Once she told Debra that if she has money, she could buy everything, including a man.

Before proceeding to the discussion of their shopping behavior, it is important to stress that the four informants in the Striver category were left on their own devices to grow up and to make sense of the world around them. It is true that these people did not

grow up experiencing abuse or turmoil in the family to the extent reported by those in the Provider, the Abused, and the Neglected categories. However, like the rest of the informants, there seemed to be no one at the earlier times in their life to guide them on how to develop a strong value in which their happiness and self-worth are not dependent on what they have.

Compulsive Buying Behavior

The Strivers' buying behavior, like that of the other types of compulsive buyers, has sociological and psychological implications. The sociological implications can be found in the types of merchandise shopped for by the Strivers during their compulsive-buying episodes. The sociological implications can also be found in what the Strivers believe this merchandise can do for them. The psychological implications can be found in the manner in which the Striver goes about their shopping. The sociological and psychological dimensions of the Strivers' buying behavior will be presented in this section.

During their compulsive-buying episodes, all "Striver" informants except Debra shop mainly for clothes and accessories. Unlike the other three informants in the Striver category, Debra rarely shops for clothes. Much of her spending has been on taxi fares and delivery foods. However, when asked what kind of things she tends to shop for, Debra mentions gadgets. Nevertheless, Debra, who does not care much about keeping up her appearance, still tries to impress others with what she has. When she was asked why she loves to buy gadgets, she indicated that seeing other people's amazement at how she manages to acquire new and innovative items is gratifying.

The Abused

Self and Upbringing

Like any compulsive buyer, the Abused grow up having low self-esteem. Although the Abused could grow up feeling deprived of material needs, their sense of self is not as distinctively defined by socio-economic conditions as in the case of the Provider or the Striver. Their senses of self, instead, are defined by being a victim of psychological and sexual abuse. Two informants, Brenda and Meg, fall into this category. Brenda grew up in a middle-class family, while Meg came from a low-income

background. They are victims of incest by their biological fathers. Besides the incest, they grew up in an unloving environment. Their mothers did nothing to protect them from the sexual abuse.

Besides having low self-esteem, one theme emerges in Brenda and Meg's self-descriptions. That is, their senses of self seem to be stigmatized by the psychological and sexual abuse they have experienced. Meg, for example, says that she used to feel "terrible" about herself, both because of the incest and because of the experience of living with her father who was a "violent person." Brenda says that she used to feel unworthy, not only because of the incest, but also because of the way she was indoctrinated into her parents' religious beliefs. That is, she was taught to believe that a woman like herself is not as worthy as a man, and that she is supposed to put the needs of others over those of her own.

Meg experienced the incest during the age of seven to 11. The incest has had a profound effect on the way she sees herself as well as how she relates to others. She has experienced periods of severe depression, but her self-esteem has improved with her growing commitment to recovery from the many obsessive-compulsive behaviors she believes she has. Her stigmatized sense of self is reflected in the following statement she made when responding to a probe as to why, in spite of her being a "strong, capable, and intelligent" person, she has "self-doubt' and even "hates" herself.

> I was extremely self-conscious, and I felt...always felt terrible...of people finding out who I was or what I was or.... I don't know if you want to know this, but I was incest as a child...from age seven on...and...just living with such a violent person.... I had...you know...I mean I felt terrible about myself.

Asides from the isolated incidences of incest, the way Meg used to feel about herself was also shaped by the daily experience in the household. Her father was violent and abusive. Her mother, in spite of her discontent with what went on in the family, seemed to avoid confronting the family dilemma. She, for example, did not acknowledge Meg's incest story. Meg recounts her experience living with her parents in the following statement:

> He (My father) was miserable to live with actually. He would blow up. It was always everybody else's fault. That's why he was mad. So, it was really

hard, and my mom…I don't know. I…I knew later…as a teenager. I realized how much she would…. I call it bitching. She would just stand in the kitchen and just…holler up. The rig being crooked or the curtain messed up or…whatever. And it wasn't the real issue. She would just be angry and she would be hollering and my dad would holler and…. Or, if us kids…as we got to be teenagers, we got kind of quieter so he didn't blow up at us. But my mom got real vocal…complaining all the time, and then they would get into a big fight. He was after her and then we tried to, you know, prevent them…from fighting. My dad was very violent.

Growing up in a middle-class family, Brenda did not face economic challenges as Meg did. But her upbringing resembles that of Meg in that she was sexually abused by her father. She vaguely remembers when it actually happened, but says it could have been between the age of three to the age of 15, when her parents moved away for her father's teaching position. She did not confront her parents about it nor report it to anyone when it happened, because she was very much under their "influence" and still tried to get their approval. It was not until she was in her 50s that she spoke up at rape-victim panels and discussed it with her parents. Her parents, determined to preserve the image of their "perfect" family, denied that the incest ever happened. In the following interview excerpt, Brenda talks about how she used to feel about herself and about the sexual and psychological abuse she experienced and how that abuse defined her sense of self and purpose.

I: When you began to be a nurse…do you like it?
R: Not really. I think I was doing it because my...parents, particularly my mother was pretty powerful in my life. I think that's what she thought I should do. I was really into…um…people pleasing.
I: Can you explain more about that? You just please your parents only?
R: Yeah. Mostly back then I was trying to get my parents' approval. I just felt that I never really…good enough…um…, you know, but I never felt that they…really totally approve of me.
I: OK. Were your parents strict?
R: Oh, yeah. Very…very strict.
I: OK. Can you give me example?
R: Well, I got spanked until I was fifteen, and for things like…not…. I was never really, you know, bad. I…um…. It was probably for talking back to my mother or my father…something like that. Plus, my father has one of these really crazy religious ideas about beating. I asked him once about…um…why I got spanked so much, and her said, "Well, like a young horse, you have to be broken."
I: Is that…he tried to intimidate you?

R: Oh, yeah, definitely…very definitely intimidating. Plus, on top of that there was…fire-and-brimstone type of preaching in church, you know, you're-going-to-burn-in-hell stuffs. That's why I am into the other religions when I got older.

I: OK. And…would you think in your mind that…the way your father did it, would you call that "abusive"? I mean physically abusive or just punishment?

R: Yeah…yeah. To me, it was abusive because…he would…he made me…. He spanked my bare bottom with his bare hand,…and I had to lay…across his lap,…and…to me, that was very definitely abusive, especially when you're doing it…when the…. I wasn't a child. I was fifteen. I was a young woman. That was a little sick, I think. It was abusive.

I: Did your mom know that how he did?

R: I think so, and I tried to talk to them about it. Um…oh, I probably started doing it when I was like in my fifty, when I realized this was abusive as well. And, there was another abuse going on, too. Um…he claimed that…he never spanked me after I was…eleven, but I always remember that he spanked me 'til I was fifteen.

I: You said that there is another kind of abuse…what are you talking about?

R: Um…my father incest me, too.

I: He did that!?

R: Yeah.

I: Oh. And your mom knew that or not?

R: Well, she was like…she was like in total denial…about all of this.

I: So, she knew.

R: I think she knew. And then, as I've been reading…all the papers and stuffs that I…gathered from her house after she died. I have done a lot of validation, and…,you know, just documentation of stuffs that…that she knew. Um…like…like the big taboo was not that my father did this, but that I decided to, you know,…speak out and tell the truth and…expose him, so to speak. That was the big taboo in our family. She…um…we were not on good term…um…from that point on, when I started speaking out about it.

It is noteworthy that the psychological abuse Brenda experienced was different from that of Meg's. Given her parents' emotional instability, the psychological abuse Meg experienced must have been obvious to her. For Brenda, however, the psychological abuse may not have been as obvious. Her parents, unlike Meg's, seemed to function well in society and must have appeared to her as functional adults. Thus, the psychological abuse, which was encapsulated in her parents' teaching, was not apparent. As a result, her sense of self is suppressed because she felt she was obligated to live up to her parent's expectation. Brenda's response to a question about her self-esteem illustrates this point.

I. OK. How do you describe yourself in terms of self-esteem?
R. Um...on the self-esteem...um...I was growing up having low self-esteem. Although, I didn't realize that at time, but...um...looking back, I know...um....
I. OK. What do you think the most important reason that...um...make you not feel good about yourself?
R. Um...a lot of it has to do with...just the branch of Christianity I was raised under. My father was within the Methodist church. He was one of these evangelical fundamentalists, fire-and-brimstone kind of person, and it really doesn't help a child's self-esteem. I mean it's not just the incest, but also the idea I got from that, you know, part of Christianity which I think Christ himself would be horrified about. It's just not good for women's self-esteem in particular, and...um...it's the idea that you put everybody else first...that kind of thing. And so, when I first started trying to do things for myself,...um...that was when I was still married, my husband would get upset, because, you know, they used to always be put first,...and then I would feel guilty about it. I don't feel that guilty...much guilty anymore, but sometimes I do.

The more subtle nature of the psychological abuse Brenda experienced may explain why she did not take any action to stop the incest when it happened as Meg did.

Compulsive Buying Behavior

Compulsive buying is essentially a means for reality escape for every informant in this study. The Provider tends to shop more when their economic security is threatened. The Striver shops for the things they believe validate their self-worth. For the Neglected, which will be described in the next section, compulsive buying is a substitute for the attention she rarely received from her parents. For the Abused, compulsive buying seems to be a means of escape in the truest sense. That is, while the Abused can be financially disciplined most of the time, she, triggered by memory of their past, can slip into episodes of compulsive buying. Brenda's shopping behavior best illustrates this point. Brenda learned to be financially disciplined from her mother. She did not spend much of her time or money on shopping while she was growing up. She remembers herself as being more careful than her ex-husband with spending, and the debt she is paying off now is the medical bills from her cancer treatment. Nevertheless, there have been occasions when Brenda engaged in compulsive buying, mostly for books and chocolates over the Internet. During the interview, she says that painful memories and her unresolved anger toward her parents may explain why she slips into compulsive buying and binge eating.

I: Are you still angry at them (her parents)?
R: I get angry at times. I do. That's probably why I have problem with eating over…eating a lot and the problem with spending thing I have. It's probably tied up with that somehow. I just started with…um…DA about two years ago.
I: OK. In what way do you think that…because they did that have to do with your eating and shopping problems?
R: Well, the eating…it was just…it was comforting, which I couldn't, you know,…um….I didn't use drugs or alcohol or some other things. That was mine…. Eating was my drug of choice, you know, to keep these painful feelings from coming up, and…um…shopping…. Um…this is weird. My parents really controlled the money, so did my husband. I didn't start shopping. Well, actually, I was really…. My parents really taught me penny-pinch, so…and I still have that…what do they call that,…pauper mentality. I…I still have that to some degree, but then, just as it was with food, when I would deprive myself trying to loose weight, then I will binge and eat way too much. I do that with shopping, too. I won't shop. I'll be real careful, penny-pinch, and then all of a sudden, I either get on…um…the Internet, like Amazon.com. I love to read, and just order a bunch of books without, you know, having it in the part of my spending plan, and…um…don't pay attention to the spending plan. Or,…go to the mal and just shop. It was just like that. I was slipped over to somebody else's mind and just do this, and so. It's not that I do it everyday or even every week, but I think, you know, some kind of pain get triggered, and I don't really handle all of that, and…that's what I do, you know. Some other people do other kinds of stuffs. I haven't really got myself…really head over heal in debt…um…with shopping like some people do. Although I has run up credit card stuff, but I have always been able to pay it. I got in trouble, and I got into DA when I ended up with the hospital bills that I couldn't pay because I didn't have medical insurance, and that's what I got into big trouble. That was really really scary, and that's when I started going to DA, and…since then, I've learned…just, you know, I have trouble with money all my life, but I just didn't know it, you know.

The Neglected

Self and Upbringing

The four informants who are identified as belonging in the "Neglected" category are Barbara, Tina, Jane, and Pat. These informants tended to experience at earlier times in their lives a significant lack of attention from their parents, which generally stemmed from their parents' busy schedules and/or emotional problems. Of the three informants, Barbara fits most into this category. She was born into an affluent family, but money seemed to be the only thing her parents gave her while she was growing up. Her father was a prominent physician; her mother quit her nursing career to be a full-time

homemaker. Neither one of them, however, had time for her or her sister. Her father was gone most of the time. He was working, traveling, and engaging in extramarital affairs. Her mother became emotionally withdrawn and, like her husband, resorted to using drugs. The first statement Barbara made when she asked about her parents is that they "were very neglectful." She had one older sister. They fought, physically, when they were young, and they have not talked to each other for years. Barbara has always been frustrated with her parents' inability to protect her from her sister's verbal and physical attacks. Barbara's upbringing environment is captured in the following interview excerpt.

I. OK. You have brothers or sisters.
R. I have one sister.
I. And that is younger than you are.
R. She is older.
I. OK. Um....how old is she now?
R. She is three and a half older than me. I think she is 46 right now, but we don't...we don't talk. We haven't seen each other for 10 years.
I. You don't talk?
R. No. In fact she...um...she did not like me from the day I was born.
I. Really!?
R. Yes. She was very jealous...of me, and...I was the baby. My parents weren't...weren't giving her very much attention. So, when I came along, I needed this attention, so she...she was very angry...at my parents...and at me.... She is a very angry...person. She is...you know...I can't say I...I know her any more. I don't. We've never been close. You know, I had a problem. I had a lot of problem growing up but I had a lot of counseling—a lot of counseling, and I think she did too.
I. OK. Do you fight for attention or something? You know...I mean.
R. Well, there is a competition between us, but I don't know what we are competing for.
I. Now, you said a while ago that you had a lot of trouble when you grew up. Can you tell me what is it?
R. Well, my parents were very...neglectful, and...um...um...let's see....
I. What do you mean neglectful? They get too much into work or something?
R. Well, we had money, and they...just didn't care. They were in their own world. My mother would say, you know, "Here is a car, here is the credit card, here is the swimming pool, do what you want to do; If you want me to drive you somewhere, I will," but she didn't hold me or comfort me or say, "Are you OK," or "Let me help you with your homework," or.... You know, she was never there for me, emotionally. And my dad was never home. He was very busy. He was

traveling all over the world. Career had him very busy, and he was...seeing lots of women on the side...lots of women.

I. And he is 400 lbs?

R. Yeah. He...he has a very charismatic power over people...and....he was...um...he was a very flamboyant, lewd, rude...um.... He didn't have any respect for life or God. Neither of my parents knew God...um.... They were both so-called Christian, you know. They went to church. They didn't know anything about...spirituality, love, or kindness. My mom was...kind, but she never...she never shows any affection to me—NEVER! She never...you know...she would cook, but we never sat down at the table as a family. I would...I would take my dinner and go to my room. My room was...um...was all blue. I had the shade pulled down. I had my own TV, my own telephone, my own stereo, my own bathroom—I was isolated.

I. Now because...because your dad...he had women on the way...and...was very busy person, is that...how is his relationship with your mom?

R. Um...he...he was demanding and...childlike, and he was just.... He would come home...like...once a month, and he would say...you know, "COOK ME LUNCH," and "GET MY CLEAN CLOTHES," and then...then he'd leave. So, she was like...a...she was just a short-order cook, and she was just...you know. We go three checks in the mail every week: my mom's allowance, my allowance, and my sister's allowance. And, so my allowance came in the form of check, and...um...I...cried a lot. I just cried a lot...because I didn't understand...I didn't know how to deal with anything, and...I had a lot of personality problems. I...um....

I. Can you give me example?

R. Um...I was just crazy. I was severely depressed, and I didn't understand relation between people. I didn't know how to act. I didn't know how to sit down and have a conversation with someone. I was very superficial, and.... My dad would come home...you know...once in a while, once in a month or so, but he would, well. We...you know...on my birthday or Christmas, he would give me beautiful jewelry, and years later, we found out that he had another HOUSE nearby, and he would say, "Oh, you know, I'm traveling or I'm in the office," you know, whatever, he never bother to call. My mom would call him, and he wouldn't pick up the phone at the office. The answering service would pick it up, and so...um...he would call my mom back and say, "I didn't answer the telephone because I am so busy, so I let the service pick it up." He wasn't at the office at all—he was in another house, and....

I. Really!? I mean...that's kind of strange. Is he with another woman or something?

R. Yes. Many...many, many, many, many, many women.

I. Really?

R. Supposedly he helped a lot of people, but I didn't see him as a very kind person. He may have helped a lot of people, but they were not...not the way Jesus would help people. (Laugh.)

I. OK. So...you know...since he came home...so you don't have any kind of relationship with him at all, right?
R. No, and I tried not to. As he came, I would walk out the other door. He...um...he was...not.... If I was around, he would...he would give me a kiss. He would expect a kiss...he would...he would expect a kiss, but it's not like, "Oh, hi, here is my daughter, give her a kiss." It was...you know...like grabbing me and give me a KISS, and then for me to give to give him a kiss, and then...you know...he would say, "Get me that, get me this, do this, do that," you know. I was not his SLAVE, you know. He didn't know how to have a relation with people...obviously, and he...um....

As noted, money was not a problem for Barbara when she was growing up. She, like her mother and her sister, received a monthly allowance from her father in the mail. She received practically no supervision. Much of her time was spent with her pets and in front of the television. In spite of her parents' impressive educational backgrounds, she received no guidance about how to pursue an education. Barbara's daily life is presented in the following interview excerpts.

I. Now, they didn't guide you that, you know, to go to college or...?
R. They didn't know how, but... and they had an education. My parents were highly educated, and my sister wanted...education, and she understood how to get one. I did not understand, and I did not get one, and my sister went to college—she has a lot of degree, but I...um...I fell in the crack in the family. I didn't...I didn't know how to do it. I didn't...I didn't know how to want it...didn't know what it could give me, so I...I, you know, let's me back up here. Um...when I was two...um...for my third birthday, I asked for a cat—I wanted a cat, and my dad brought home a cat, and I...love cats, and I...I was already having problem with my parents at that age, and I used to hide under the bed, and...with my cat and the dog...I was isolated with the cat and the dog at that early age of three, and I just started living my life with the dog and the cat. They were like my parents—they loved me and they cared for me—they were there for me. Emotionally, they were there for me, and I...I became a nurse, but I didn't like it, and so I, surprisingly enough, just looked through the newspaper and bough a dog grooming shop, dog and cat grooming.
I. OK. What kind of TV program you watch now?
R. None.
I. You don't watch any?
R. I haven't watch TV in about...five years.
I. Really!?
R. Yeah, because I was so addicted to it.
I. Oh!
R. None.
I. You mean you were addicted to TV and then you have to abstain from it?

R. Yes.
I. Can you tell me about your addiction to TV?
R. Well, my parents were neglecting me, you know, I was just...I was not a good student at school. I just plunged in front of TV and...that was my life, you know. It was...um...my parenting and my...interaction. It was, you know, I was just neglected. I was just very neglected. I should have been reading. I should have been studying and playing with other children. I was isolating. I was just watching an hour an hour an hour an hour an hour of TV.

Barbara's sense of self, like that of other compulsive informants, is impacted by low self-esteem. Specifically, she described herself as having low-self esteem, being susceptible to depression, being unable to establish intimate interpersonal relationships, and being unable to trust people. Thanks to her extensive and ongoing participation in the various recovery programs, she is now grateful that she does not have as many personality problems as she used to when she was younger. As she mentioned in the following interview excerpt, she seems to attribute all of these problems to her upbringing environment.

I. Now...OK...tell me how you describe yourself?
R. Ooh! On...on what level? (Laugh.) Emotional?
I. (Laugh.) OK. Yeah, like...like emotional...how do you see yourself...like in terms of your self-esteem, you know? What is your personality?
I. Physically, I'm very attractive, and I...I...um...grew up with...(laugh)...no self-esteem—no surprise. I thought I was very ugly.
I. Really!?
R. Yes, because I...I was ugly on the inside, but I...I was very...um...depressed. I thought...I thought nobody like me. I thought...um...I guess I thought this because...my parents didn't like me enough to...be FRIEND with me or to love me or to hold me or touch me or kiss me. I had no family love—NONE, and...um...there are one aunt, and I...I see a lot now, but at the time I saw her very...you know...like once a year, and she was very nice to me, but she...she's my mom's sister, so she had the same disease. She didn't get love either. My parents didn't give love because they never got love from their parents, so this is handed down generation...you know...from generations.

Tina is another informant who fits into the Neglected category of compulsive buyers. Tina did not grow up in an upscale family like that of Barbara, and it was her mother, instead of her father, who contributed to the chaos in the family. Nevertheless, her upbringing environment and how it contributed to her low self-esteem and the feeling of being worthless and ignored are comparable to Barbara's experience. In spite of her

impressive career in clinical research, she still sees herself as someone who is irresponsible, undeserving of any success, and susceptible to anxiety, and she attributes, at least partly, her low sense of self-worth to a lack of attention from her mother. When asked about her experiences with depression, Tina responded as follows:

> I. OK. You said that you, you know, you had depression,...um...what...what kind of thing that...that triggers your depression?
> R. Um...well, my weight is the big thing right now, feeling overweight. Um...I think sometimes...I...I'll be anxious for so long...that then I'll end up feeling depressed...like...like maybe after I get a big project done, then I'll be...really...kind of drained, depressed,...um..., you know, just...constant worry.
> I. About your project?
> R. Or, it could be...like feeling, "Am I good enough?" "Is my husband gonna leave me?" Even though there is no reason right now to worry why, I had believed that he's gonna leave me, and I'm afraid of it. So...I'm—I mean sometimes I'm afraid I will loose my job even though...I do a good work and have no reason to feel that way. So I just tend to...worry a lot.
> I. Why do you think that you have reason to believe that you are not good enough? I mean...you seem to do well. You are, you know, good mother...even to your step-children. What do you think that would make you feel...you are not good enough?
> R. Um....I just...I mean...I think is it the fact that...there is nothing I can do to please my mom or...or get her attention.

As noted, it was her mother who contributed to the unpredictability in Tina's upbringing environment. Her father was capable of providing her with affection and stability. Because he was at work most of the time, she, along with her siblings, was left with her mother, who is susceptible to obsessive-compulsive behaviors. She had problems with drinking, spending in the past, and with gambling in the present. She became abusive, verbally and physically, when she was drunk. She would attack her husband and her children. To protect herself from the attack, Tina made herself invisible by being very quiet and by not doing anything to provoke her mother's temper. Although Tina was afraid of her mother in the past and has no desire to be close to her in the present, her sense of self seems to evolve around her perception that she is not worthy of her mother's attention. Much of her mother's attention, as she sees it, seemed to be given to Tina's older sister, who was not afraid to confront her mother with equal violence and who engaged in the "bad stuff" like drinking and smoking. In the following interview

excerpt, when Tina was asked about her mother's compulsive buying behavior, she mentions the unequal attention she and her sister received from her mother and how she has felt about it.

> I. OK. Did she buy anything for children—I mean for you or your brother or sister?
> R. She spoiled my sister. I will buy...my sister lots and lots of things, but she didn't spend money on me or...my brother.
> I. How come?
> R. Um...she kind of thought that my sister's life was exciting and so.... She was...overly involved in my sister's life.
> I. OK. What your sister is doing now as a career?
> R. She—actually she was a mining engineer, but she couldn't find the job because the economy was bad and so. She was a...mechanical engineer, and worked for...Ford Motor Company for...several years and decided to buy a bowling alley. That is what she does now. She owns a bowling place.
> I. OK. Um...did you feel...did you feel unloved by your mother while at the same time she loved your sister?
> R. Yeah. That was hard.
> I. How so?
> R. Um...my sister was really, you know, like she drank and smoked and did all...the bad stuffs, you know. And I...I felt like...invisible...like...like I couldn't get my mother's attention. And so...I remember—I was about twelve, and I went in the bedroom and smoked cigarette, and I came out and I told my mother..., you know. I wanted to get some attention...or some reaction from her, but..."Oh, guess what...Therese has smoked her fist cigarette," you know. She didn't—it was like, you know, as if I was damn if I...I was, you know, damn if I did, damn if I didn't. I mean there is not really way to get attention from her.

Another informant who fits into the "Neglected" category is Pat. Before moving on to discuss Pat's upbringing environment and sense of self, it is necessary to note that Pat did experience abuse in her life. As a child, she was sexually abused by her babysitters, and then as a wife, she was sexually abused by her husband, now ex-husband. Nevertheless, Pat was identified as the Neglected type instead of the Abused type for the following reason. Among the many unfortunate incidences Pat experienced in her life, she considers the fact that she was an adopted child and how she came to learn about this fact to be "the most devastating experience" in her life.

> I. OK. Um...if I ask you what would be the most...devastating experience that you encounter in your life?

R. Well, I was sexually abused...as a child, and I was also adopted. I had a strange experience when my biological father...um.... My mother was married to my father, had me, and then divorced him and married his brother, and...um...I grow up not knowing this until I read my baby book when I was about...eleven, and that was really devastating for me, and in fact I'm still...in counseling around that situation right now.
I. OK. What was...the point that is so bad about that? I mean, you know, what exactly you think...that makes you so...feel so bad about that?
R. Well, when my parents told me I was adopted, my father was drinking. He was alcoholic, and he came home from work, and...his mother had died when he was about three years old, so...when they were telling me I was adopted, he was crying thinking I was going to abandon him, and so...I never had an opportunity to...get my feeling taken care of, plus I don't think I was really bonded with my siblings because...I...the self talk I told myself after...um...I was told I was adopted that I shouldn't get angry because these people are just...nice letting me stay there, so I need to be...really good, so I never really asked myself.... So, I'm in the process of healing on that now.

Pat did not experience any abuse from her stepfather but felt that his drinking problem caused him to be negligent of her and her mother. Because of his drinking problem, Pat's mother had an emotional problem of her own to deal with. The manner in which Pat was left to deal with her knowledge of the adoption was one of the examples of how she was affected by a lack of emotional nourishment in her upbringing. She received no guidance as to how to go about pursuing a life goal. "Turmoil" was the word she used to describe her household, and she observed how her mother dealt with it by rearranging the household surroundings. She did the same as a temporary distraction from dealing with the problems in her marriage to her ex-husband. Like other informants in this category, a lack of clear sense of self and purpose seem to be the central theme in her self-perception. Her sense of self is best illustrated by her description of what she was like when her shopping became escalated. She said, "(My self-esteem) was very...low because I was...not taking care of myself. I wasn't.... I didn't have a clear sense of who I was as a single person...."

Thus, it seems no coincidental that she now sees that she has to incorporate the practice of "value clarification," namely asking oneself what really matters in one's life, into her recovery process. Barbara seems to have practiced value clarification of sort when she started examining how many material things she truly needs after she sold her

pet-grooming business. Today, she is very watchful of not allowing other people's opinions as well as cultural norms, which is also perpetuated in the mass media, to influence how she lives her life. In short, a lack of a sense of identity seems to be the theme of the Neglected's sense of self, and the search for this sense of identity seems to be an important part of their recovery experience.

The other informant belonging to the Neglected category is Jane. Jane, like Tina, is very much at the beginning stage of her recovery. That is, she, as well as Tina, has come to the realization that she has a problem controlling her impulses to buy. The two know what kind of stimuli they are particularly vulnerable to and try to avoid them. Jane has cancelled her newspaper subscription because she knows she can be tempted by department stores' newspaper inserts. Tina listens mostly to AM radio stations to avoid sales-promotional spots at certain stores. Jane grew up in a family where the father had complete authority over everybody else. He could be physically abusive with Jane and all of her brothers, especially when he was under the influence of alcohol. Although her mother was kind to Jane and her brothers, she did little to protect them from the abuse. This is how Jane describes her father:

> My father was mean, and I don't know whether he drink or not, I don't know, but, he was a very mean, cold English man. And, the English, they...they only believe that the boys are important and the girls are not. My father learned that you don't have to educate the daughter. He didn't send me to school. That's why school was so important to me. I had to do it all on my own. He never paid any of my school expenses, never....He never said, "I love you." One time, in my forty, and I was walking down the hall, and not even in his room, and he said, "I love you, Jane," and I went back into his room and said, "This is the first time you've ever said that to me in my whole live." He was just...a very cold man.

Besides being deprived of the emotional bond with her parents, Jane, like her brothers, was also deprived of material things she believes her parents' income could have actually allowed them to afford. These are toys and special holiday celebrations. She believes that her tendency to collect figurines and ornamental objects is an outgrowth of this deprivation.

> The shopping started...the shopping started because...we never had anything. We were not poor. We bought motels. They built the motel, bought another motels, so that they have four of them, and yet, we lived like very poor

> people. I had to wear my brother's clothes, we had to go to.... We didn't have yard sales then, you know. They had...um...a rummage sale. They would take me, and I would have to wear the clothes that belonged to people in my school, very embarrassing. So, I never...had nice clothes. I never had anything nice. I had one doll, and my brother pulled its head off, and my mother said, "If that's how you do, you don't get anymore." Now, you see why I have three thousands of them. That's why I started shopping...because...I never had anything, and I felt deprived, and my brothers felt deprived. We had one toy box that had only...maybe one-third full, and four children, and so, you see, we all felt deprived. My brother collects toy soldiers because he never had any toys. I collect dolls because I never had any dolls.

Jane, like Barbara, had thoughts about committing suicide. She noted that depression and being suicidal and a proclivity for collecting objects runs in her family. She has experienced periods of depression. The other interesting aspect of how Jane described herself is that she still in some way seeks approval from her father, who has already passed away. For example, knowing that her father held in high esteem education, she still to this day tries to make good grades at the college. This is in spite of the fact that she does not need any degree in her line of work.

Compulsive Buying Behavior

The informants in this category, like any compulsive buyer, use shopping and buying as a temporary remedy for their emotional setbacks. Nevertheless, an examination of how they describe their shopping and buying behaviors during the compulsive buying episodes reveal the patterns of meanings. Overall, there seem to be two themes concerning these informants' compulsive buying. The first theme has to do with their constant search for the objects that reflect their yearning for their parents' affection they did not receive while they were growing up. Barbara and Jane's patterns of compulsive buying epitomize this theme. The other theme that reflects these informants' compulsive buying involves the use of shopping and buying for a self-nurturing purpose. This theme, to further explain, reflects these informants' tendency to search for and acquire their favorite merchandise in order to fulfill their desire to have the sense of security they never had as a child. Pat and Tina's compulsive buying behavior represent this theme. A clarification of the foregoing conceptual discussion of these two

themes can be enhanced by the informants' own accounts of their compulsive buying behavior.

Barbara, like Jane, tends to collect the merchandise that represents her parent's affection she missed growing up. As noted, Jane collects stuffed bears, figurines, and ornamental items. Barbara, in a comparable manner, collects jewelry. She does not buy jewelry as often as she used to prior to the liquidation of her pet-grooming business, but she still loves them. To her, jewelry is a means by which her father showed his affection toward her.

> I. You said that you sometimes are hungry to...to buy jewelry, tell me...you know...what comes into your thinking when that occurs?
> R. You know...you know, it's not...it's not a thinking. It is a feeling of...of...Gosh, it's a really strong feeling of...of wanting a piece of jewelry, you know, just something small and pretty, you know, something special just for me, where it's mine...almost like how I feel about the cat, the small thing just for me as opposed to, you know. I...in my house...household growing up, there was never anything for me. I was never special or never...um...there was never anything for me, you know, and I'm sure it was true. I mean there was no love, but I didn't know that's what I was looking for, you know. I had my room, but my sister would barge in at anytime, and...and hit me or.... There is nothing special for me, and I would always fell like when it's gonna be my turn, when there's gonna something for me, and...and I guess...I guess going out and getting sex, you know, just sleeping with anybody, I thought that was gonna fix me too.

Pat and Tina still shops regularly for their favorite merchandise. Pat shops mostly for clothes and accessories, and Tina, due to her weight, shops more for accessories than for clothes. To the two informants, the act of shopping is a self-nurturing experience. Tina shops almost everyday for purses and jewelry at discount stores. Shopping is her means of releasing any anxiety about her work, graduate studies, and relationship with her husband. She did not shop much while she was growing up, mainly because of the financial limitation as well as a perception of herself as an overweight person. Her shopping "blossomed" when she started losing weight at around the age of 25. Presently, she is overweight, and thus hesitates to buy clothes for herself. She rarely uses what she buys, especially if it is her favorite items, for fear of wearing them out. Pat, like Tina, shops as a means to cope with emotional setbacks. Having learned that she was adopted,

she was frustrated and became emotionally detached from her family. Shopping gave her a sense of belonging and stability that she felt she never received from anyone in her life.

> I. Do you feel that often? I mean...do you buy something that makes you feel remorseful often?
> R. I have my pressure group and I have my people sit down with me to decide what I need to spend money on every week. I do...every month, I do abide for the most part, but for the last few months, I haven't been having my pressure group, so I have been spending than I...probably should be....One thing I want to mention to you is that...I was adopted as a child. I mother was married to my dad and divorced him, and married his brother. I didn't find out about this, and so I didn't get any help in dealing with this. After my parents told me I was adopted, I didn't feel a part of the family, and my spending, as a kid, became a substitute for having a sense of belonging.
> I. So, the sad part is that you think you don't really belong in the family?
> R. That was what I felt for many years, and...so, what happened was I ended up.... Because people were so unpredictable in my life, and I couldn't count on them, I think what happened was that...I started to...be more attracted to...things in my life...clothing and decoration, because I can count on them being more...um...dependable in a certain aspect.
> I. So, who are these people you think that...they are...unpredictable?
> R. Well, my parents certainly were, because they didn't help me at all...with the adoption, and...I just didn't.... I got so I didn't rely on people as much, because they weren't there for me...when I needed them.

Later, after she was divorced and started living on her own for the first time, her shopping really escalated, thanks to the proliferation of credit card solicitations. Financially for the first time, she actually experienced the financial consequences of compulsive buying. Nevertheless, emotionally, shopping is a means to independently express herself, especially through home decoration. Unlike most informants in the study who, after recovery, tend to hold a negative view about shopping, Pat still sees shopping as a means for a "self-nurturing experience." She does not see a need to completely abstain from shopping as leisure as much as to prevent it from overriding her sense of priority.

Mass Media and Compulsive Buyers' Meanings of Self and Buying

As discussed in Chapter 2, Symbolic Interactionism, the framework guiding this study, states the following assumptions about human behavior:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;

2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

This study uses these assumptions to answer why a person engages in a particular behavior: compulsive buying. Guided by the first assumption, the task of data analysis involves an assessment of what certain merchandise and the process of acquiring it means to the informants. Guided by the second and the third assumptions, the analysis involves an assessment of the environment in which these informants grew up. Using the Symbolic Interactionism terminology, this assessment addresses the informants' experiences of interacting with others in their upbringing environments. The findings reported thus far in this chapter are limited to the interpersonal level of interactions between the informants and others, mostly within the family environment.

In this section, the framework of Symbolic Interactionism is applied beyond the scope of interpersonal communication to explore the informants' meanings of self and of buying that are derived from their exposure to mass media. In order to apply the framework of Symbolic Interactionism in this fashion, it is important to assume that the informants' exposure to mass media is a form of interactive relationship. Methodologically speaking, the framework of Symbolic Interactionism is used to generate these three a priori themes: mass media role, mass media content, and interaction with mass media. Then, these themes are used to group the various themes derived from coding the informants' responses to the questions about mass media and advertising. The theoretical justification for using these themes are that they capture the essence of interpersonal communication where people extract meanings not only from what is said but also from who says it and how.

For the rest of this chapter, these three themes are discussed more extensively. A selection of interview excerpts will be used to illustrate the meanings of the sub-themes

grouped under these three major themes. But before embarking on the extensive discussion of these three themes, it is useful to address the context in which the informants' attitudes toward mass media are formed. Two contextual issues, informants' definitions of mass media and extent of mass media exposure are discussed in the following section. After this section, the discussion then turns to the three themes.

Contextual Issues

Definitions of Mass Media

The informants' definitions of mass media reflect the diminishing line between the editorial and the advertising domains of mass-mediated presentations. That is, advertising is a part of the informants' understanding of what mass media is. The first indication of their perception of advertising as a part of mass media is their quick mention of the various forms of commercial persuasion in their responses to the "grand-tour" question about how they think of the mass media. In the following interview excerpts, four informants mention advertising, TV commercials, credit card ads, and infomercials in their answers to this question: How do you feel about the mass media?

Pam:

> I. How do you feel about the mass media...generally?
> R. I don't care for it?
> I. How so?
> R. Well, you know, I try to practice the principle of Debtor Anonymous, and one of my principles is that I have to stay away from it?
> I. Why do you feel you have to stay away from it?
> R. Oh, you have to stay away from advertisements. They are predators. Part of the...I believe part of the program or part of the process is to stay away from it as much as possible, just like an alcoholic stays away from Bud Weiser.

Dorothy:

> I. OK. How do you feel about the mass media?
> R. Um...I...I feel very negative about...things...like...um...I used to hate it when I see cigarette commercials...stuffs like that, and...um...stuffs that...glorify women, models, you know. I think they make...um...unhealthy...um.... The way that...women are portrayed in...um...the industry of glamour, I...I don't feel good about that.

Tina:

> I. OK. Based on your experience in the past and in the present, how do you...how do you feel about the mass media?

R. Um...okay. That's a lot of big question. (Laugh.) Um...I guess like if I see an ad like for a...credit card,...um...I...I feel angry.

Pat:

I. OK. Let's see...um...how about the media...um...how do you feel about the mass media?
R. I think that you can get a lot of subliminal messages from watching TV, and I think you just have to be careful.
I. What do you mean by subliminal message
R. Well, I think the media is designed to stir our interest in spending, and...um...there's a lot that you can see. If you are not sure what your value system is, it is really easy to just feel like you need a lot of thing that in fact you don't really need.
I. Do you think...do you think that the mass media intend that?
R. Yeah, I think they do.
I. Um...can you give me example that you said that the mass media...um...stir your interest...can you give me example of how you think they do that?
R. Um...there are the infomercials where they're selling you the products, so I think you just have to be careful.

Other informants who did not readily mention any form of commercial persuasion did mention advertising when they were asked to give a definition of mass media. Mary's definitions of mass media illustrate this.

I. So, when you think of the media, you tend to think of the news media first?
R. Yeah, and I think of advertisement. I think of it all. I think the shows on television. Also, the shows on television, again, I think that they..., you know, a lot of time they put stuffs on there they shouldn't. I'm not a real conservative, but I think of the children, and I think that they should be more careful of what children are seeing.

It is also important to note that it was uncommon for these informants to use the terms, "mass media," "advertising," and "TV commercial" interchangeably. Thus, it appears that advertising and mass media mean to these informants an agent of commercial persuasion. Two informants observed that advertising and mass media work differently to persuade. The following comparisons by Mary and Jan suggest that mass media are subtler and more profoundly influential than advertising.

Mary:

I. OK. Can you compare the way...advertising and the content part of the mass media in...influencing your shopping habits?
R. Advertising tells me about...where to go...to get stuffs, and...stuffs like that. They both...influence me in terms of images, the images that make me want stuffs,...um...and advertisement...gives me more of immediate things, you know, like what store I can go get things, you know, those image-producing items. The media, like the TV shows..., you know, some of the fashion magazine articles, they will make me..., you know, the images are there, and in the advertising too, but...um...what the advertising does is...to show me...where I can go...buy that things, you know, the place or store I can go buy that things that I want to create that image. It gives me more specific and what the price is and what the sale is.

Jan:

I. So, can you compare...the way advertising and the media portray happiness?
R. Well, the advertising on TV, or in the newspapers and the magazines are trying to sell you something, and the TV drama...they are trying to make you think certain way.

Mass Media Exposure

The extent and the manner in which the informants were exposed to the mass media while they were growing up are other contextual issues to provide an understanding of the informants' perception of the mass media. Television, radio, and magazines seem to be the forms of mass media mainly used by the informants. At an earlier time in their lives, the informants used mass media mainly for entertainment. Most watched sitcoms on TV. Some watched entertainment programs such as shows with animal-related themes (Debra), cartoons (Tina), movies with human-interest themes (Pat), and variety shows (Jan). A few who regularly watched soap operas did not do so until later in their lives, usually after they were married and stayed home raising children. Brenda, Tina, and Jan fit this description. These informants did not mention radio as often as TV. A few informants listened to music (Pam and Jan) and soap operas (Brenda). Besides television, magazines were another medium commonly used by the informants. The informants started reading magazines when they were in high school. Again, these informants tend to read magazines for entertainment purposes. A few informants (Dorothy, Brenda, and Pat) were interested in magazines with in home-decoration and

household-maintenance themes. *McCall's* and *Lady's Home Journal* are cited as examples. About half of the informants were into fashion, especially during the early years of their adulthood. These informants are Rita, Mary, Jan, Meg, Pat, Tina, and Jane. They mentioned such titles as *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Glamour* as a means to keep up with fashion trends during their teenage years. Except for Jane, who still reads *Cosmopolitan* for advice on relationships, these informants no longer keep up with these magazines.

As for the extent of mass media use, the overall impression is that all but one informant was a not heavy user of mass media of any kind. The exception was Barbara, who had a TV set in her bedroom and was allowed to watch it whenever she wanted. She would spend as much as ten hours a day watching sitcoms and advertising. It practically replaced her parents, and it became an addiction. Other informants were inhibited by their parents' disciplines, responsibilities, or family circumstances from spending as much time watching TV. Rita, for example, was not allowed to staying late, and she had to watch whatever her father watched on TV. These included news and such fictional shows as *Mattlock*, *All in the Family*, and the *Mary Tyler Moore* show. Pam, Dorothy, and Brenda did not watch much television because much of their time was devoted to part-time jobs, housework, and school, respectively. The informants who grew up in a family with abusive parents tended to not watch much television because they did not want to be in the presence of their abusive parents. This situation is particularly applied to Dorothy and Meg. Radio, which was used by Pam and Jan for music and by Brenda for soap operas, was more of a means of filling spare time. Recall as well that much of Pam's time was devoted to working and Brenda's to studying. The informants who read magazines to keep up with fashion did not necessarily do so in an addictive manner. For one, they either could not afford to buy the magazine regularly or were not allowed by the parents to subscribe to these magazines. Jane, for example, read them at the local library because her parents did not allow her to waste money on them. Other informants simply could not afford them and say they only purchased them once in a while from supermarket checkouts. (*The summary of each informant's mass media exposure is shown in Table 2, page 129.*)

Table 2: Summary of the Informants' Mass Media Exposure

Informant	Childhood and Teenage					Present				
	TV	Radio	News-papers	Maga-zines	Books	TV	Radio	News-papers	Maga-zines	Books
Pam		Music				Movies				
Dorothy				Home style		Movies Drama			Finance Fitness	
Rita	News Sit-coms			Fashion		Drama Sit-coms			News Book reviews	Fiction
Debra		Music						National and foreign news	News Book reviews Cooking	Non-fiction
Mary	Sit-coms			Fashion	Mystery	Sit-coms News			Social trends Health	
Jan	Soap opera	Music		Fashion		Talk shows Drama Sit-coms News		Local news	Home style	
Brenda		Soap opera		Home style		Soap opera	Talk radio			
Meg				Fashion		Home style Cooking				
Barbara	Sit-coms				Rom-ance True Crime					Rom-ance True crime
Pat	Movies			Fashion Home style		Movies QVC				
Tina	Sit-coms Soap opera			Fashion			Talk radio			
Jane			Letters	Home style		News Home style Cooking	Talk radio		Fashion	

Advertising Exposure

The informants share similar sentiment toward advertising with most people. That is, they do not like advertising now, and, except for Barbara, they did not like advertising when they were growing up. Growing up, Barbara watched whatever was on TV, including commercials. She loved the jingles and sang along with them. For other informants, their attitudes toward advertising seem to be ambivalence at best. Jan, for example, called advertising a "necessary evil." The mass media industry cannot exist without it. Rita views advertising as a diverse source of information necessary for the free market, but sees that it has contributed to a higher cost of merchandise. The form of advertising the informants do not like in particular is TV commercials. One can easily relate to the ways in which these informants avoid seeing commercials. These include walking into another room, doing something else, or fast-forwarding (for VCR recordings of programs). Nevertheless, the informants do expose themselves to advertising, especially when it comes in the forms in which specific information about the merchandise they are interested in can be searched on their own terms. These include newspaper inserts, magazine ads, mail-order catalogs, and Internet search engines. In short, selective exposure seems to be the term best to describe the manner in which these informants were exposed to advertising.

Perception of the Mass Media Institution

The "mass media role" theme represents the composite view of the informants' perceptions of mass media as an institution functioning within the context of the American society. The informants' perception of the mass media's principal interests and motivations are also grouped under this theme. The informants' perceptions of mass media role is analogous to ones' assessments of the interacting partners in interpersonal communication in terms of who they are and what their motivation is.

There are a number of themes derived from categorizing the informants' responses to questions about mass media, and advertising yielded a number of themes that pertains to one's perception of mass media role. Each of these themes can be identified as belonging to one of these five topics: the affiliation of mass media and advertising, mass media as a consumer socialization agent, the affiliation of mass media

and corporate America; the underlying motivation of the mass media enterprises, mass media and the American consumer culture. Because the first topic, the affiliation of mass media and advertising, has been discussed in the "Contextual Issues" section as pertaining to the informants' definitions of mass media, only the last four topics will be discussed in this section.

Mass Media as a Consumer Socialization Agent

Some informants perceived mass media as playing a major role in how people learn about what is going on outside the domain of their everyday experience. Three informants see themselves and others as relying more and more on mass media and advertising in this aspect. The attitudes seem to vary among these informants as to whether it is beneficial for people to rely on the mass media to perform this role. Barbara seems to hold a negative attitude toward people's reliance on the mass media. Mary and Jan are not as critical of the fact that they have to rely on the mass media to perform this role. Unlike Barbara, who generally sees mass media as trying to "brainwash" people, Mary sees that one can learn something useful from the mass media. Jan sees the omnipresence of the mass media as a fact of life and their influence on herself as inevitable. Barbara, Mary, and Jan's statements revealing their perceptions of the socialization role of the mass media are as follows:

Barbara:

> I. OK. You said that people now that they don't think for themselves, can you be more...like specific on that?
> R. Well,...um...I think...they just they're supposed to grow up, get married, have a baby. They go to the grocery stores. They buy the things they see advertised on TV...um, you know. They don't read as much as...people did years ago. Um...they don't talk to their friends. They get so much their input through the media...of how to live and what to buy. They are not thinking on their own, you know.

Mary:

> I. OK. Do you think that the mass media have anything to do with the way you live your life?
> R. Sure. I get a lot of my information about the.... I get most of my information about the world, you know, the society from the mass media.

Jan:

I. OK. Do you think that advertising has any influence on your life...generally?
R. In what way?
I. In any way.
R. Of course.
I. How so?
R. That is the only way we know how things are. Well, that's one of the way...that we know how things are. Whether it is true or not...or a reality or not, one version of the way life is, and that's gonna influence us to some extent.

The Affiliation of Mass Media and Corporate America

Every informant seems convinced that the mass media's operations are profit-driven, but two informants, Mary and Meg, actually recounted their learning of the incidences where the mass media's editorial decisions are influenced by their sponsoring organizations.

Meg:

I. Okay. How do you find out that the media are controlled by these industries?
R. Well, by just...to my own experience through the medical system basically. My son had ear infection after ear infection after ear infection when he was three years old. The doctor kept giving him antibiotic, and I kept asking him what's wrong here, and he couldn't tell me, giving me the old lie about...uh...uh...if children stay horizontal, and so consequently bacteria builds up. I kept saying how come these bacteria build up. Well, those answers were lacking something, and so I went to a natural health food store, and...and ran to a doctor. We talk about dairy products being the problem, and then I started.... That was 10 years ago, well, 12 years ago...11 years...whatever. Uh...I soon found out that...you know...even our basic four food groups is a marketing ploy by...the meat industry, dairy industry, and the USDA,...uh...Department of Agriculture. You know...it was used for...to promote products. They were there not to protect the public. They were there to promote the products. So, consequently, I have been fed B.S. all my life through...school system and the USDA and then the media about the four food groups. And also having my own physical experience prior to that...before I was even married second time...of knowing about something was wrong because I wasn't...feeling okay. And, anyway, I took my son off dairy. It was very difficult, and it was very...anti-social thing to do, according to most people. So, anyway, through all of that, I realize...you know...by just watching television, I was just stuck by who controlled the media, who...you know. It was obvious from the commercials. Reading articles about television, about

who...who support...you know...who pay for all this. So, that's how I found out...from my own personal experience.

Mary:

I. OK. In a general sense, how do you feel about the mass media?
R. Um...I would say a little bit suspicious.
I. How so?
R. I don't think the news media.... I think the news media...um..., you know, filter a lot out. It...it's influenced by advertisers. I didn't used to think that way when I was in college, but I think that way now. My husband...showed me the occasions that that is the case. I think the news media is...is too influenced by advertisers, I think. For example, like I have as story of a doctor who was interviewed about the environmental problems that cause the health problem, and they are going to run the story, and all of a sudden the story got pulled, and, I don't know, it was because of a big chemical company. Um...as far as the advertising,...um...they are all in it just to make money, so they are promoting materialism at the expense of...um...people's well being. I guess that's the way the world works.

The Underlying Motivation of the Mass Media Operations

The informants are generally mistrustful of the mass media's motivations, not only in the advertising context but also the editorial domain as well. They have come to see mass media as self-seeking and profit-driven to the point that they will intentionally attempt to influence the various aspects of their audience's thinking. In the area of consumption, the mass media are seen as being motivated by their desire for wealth and power to promote relentless acquisition of material things. The statements that are made by Barbara, Pat, Pam, and Debra illustrate the informants' perception of mass media and advertising's motivations.

Barbara:

I. OK. Let's me read this to you. "Do you think people learn something by exposing to the media?"
R. Oh,...I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if they learn something. I don't...I don't like the mass media at all. I don't like, you know. It's so...it's so...um...political and so filtered, and when...when a person reads it, they think they're reading the truth, and I don't believe they are. I think it's lies and advertising, and I think they try to make people think certain way. I don't...I think it's very controlling. They're trying to control the people.
I. And that is just...consumption kind of thing?

R. Not just consumption, but I think they're trying to brainwash the people politically, financially, socially. I, you know, I don't think we have freedom of the press. I think it's very politically controlled.
I. Do you think they do that intentionally? I mean they know what they're doing?
R. Yeah, they know what they're doing. The people don't know what they're reading, but...the media know what they're doing.

Pat:

I. OK. Let's see...um...how about the media...um...how do you feel about the mass media?
R. I think that you can get a lot of subliminal messages from watching TV, and I think you just have to be careful.
I. What do you mean by subliminal message
R. Well, I think the media is designed to stir our interest in spending, and...um...there's a lot that you can see. If you are not sure what your value system is, it is really easy to just feel like you need a lot of thing that in fact you don't really need.
I. Do you think...do you think that the mass media intend that?
R. Yeah, I think they do.

Pam:

I. Can you give me example that...the mass media don't want it this way?
R. I don't think the mass media want it this way because they are making money off the people, and they keep people strand in their debt, they keep people strand in their lifestyle, and they get it the way they want, and they get more power. The companies get more power this way, you know, clothing companies, you know, whatever...any type of companies. They gain power as long as they keep people in debt. I don't like that. I don't believe in that anymore. I prefer to be myself and to be happy with the amount of money I make and spend it the way I want to spend it, and I think the mass media force them, to some degree, to spend it the way they want it spent. Thinking about it, "My God, these people are insane." But you think about it...they do. They want those people to buy those SUVs, buy this, buy that,...(laugh)...and you're gonna owe me x amount this month, you're gonna work for me.

Debra:

I. OK. That's OK. I'll ask you next question. OK. Is there anything about the images that is being portrayed in the media that concern you?
R. Um…I'm not sure exactly what you mean.
I. OK. Like…the image…like the idea that the mass media present to you this is the way the world is or the way the world works, or this is the way the reality is…that….

R. ???

I. Um…do you understand the question?

R. Yeah, I think I do. Well, there are two things going on, and I guess it sort of makes me mad sometimes because I can see what they're doing. I know that they are trying to manipulate me. I'm bright enough to know that they manipulate me,…and still I'm manipulated. (Laugh)

Mass Media and the Materialism Culture

Although the informants generally see mass media as being motivated by a desire for financial gains, they seem to understand that the mass media are a part of the American culture where the materialism ideology is championed. The materialism ideology, which is referred to by some informants (e.g. Debra and Pat) as "The American Dream," already exists in the symbolic domain of American society. What the mass media and advertising do, according to these informants, is to echo this ideology so that it is perceived as the way life is supposed to be lived. Jane, for example, observed that women in advertising have changed from being portrayed mainly as a housewife to a career-driven woman, because of the changes in the social and economic structures of the American society after the World War II. Because of the media and the advertising, Jane sees that it is acceptable now for her and other women to be self-sufficient. Rita, Debra, and Pam's statements illustrate their perceptions of the mass media as an institution whose messages and agenda are not entirely their own invention but rather the reflection of the materialism that already exists as a mainstream ideology in the American society.

Rita:

I. OK. Do you think advertising has any...influence on your life?

R. Oh, yeah, I do.... Um...whether I want to or not,...it does.

I. OK. Can you…can you explain that or…?

R. Um...it's...it's a part of our culture. So much so that sometimes...um...when I'm watching thing, I don't even realize what it's doing until later on, and I WATCH thing a lot, you know… and…um...I forgot the question. (Laugh.)

Debra:

I. Where do you get this idea? I mean where do you get this idea that this is not from the real world?

R. Well, I guess in the real world everybody wants money too. (Laugh) But they don't talk about much as the media does, and I mean, you know, from the very beginning, they target to children and to everybody—children or not—you

know this is the latest, the is the biggest breakthrough, this is the only whatever that you will ever need, you know, it has a life-time guarantee, you don't have to buy another one. It's all of that. And…I don't know…I just get the feeling that…yeah, they market it that if you are a successful person, and you are a thinking person, then you want these products. And I know I am being manipulated and still…it works. It sure will.

Pam:

I. You mean just the last few months?

R. Yes, during the last few months, but...I'm learning that those are sign of debting, and that I can recover on one-day-at-a-time basis and get back on track again as long as I keep my number, go to meetings, talk to people in the program, and work this program because this program is very difficult. It's the most difficult Twelve-Step program I've ever worked.

I. How so?

R. It really hit issue that people don't like to talk about in the society because of the mass media, because the mass media in this country want their way. And if you go this way to the DA program, they don't like people like us, I don't think, because it is hard to talk to people that don't want to follow the mass media way.

Mass Media's Portrayal of Happiness

The informants' perceptions of mass media content resemble ones' understanding of what is said in interpersonal communication. Because the subject of this study, in a broader sense, is about how a group of consumers go about acquiring things, these consumers' perception of what is portrayed in the mass media as an ingredient for happiness seems to be the most relevant theme to pursue as far as their perception of mass media's portrayal is concerned. In essence, what is discussed in this section is the informants' perceptions of what is portrayed, both in the editorial and advertising contexts, as the guidelines of how one's life is supposed to be lived. The discussion is based on the informant's statements given when they were asked to describe what they see as "the ideal image of happiness as being portrayed in the media" as well as to state if they have any concerns at all about what is being portrayed in the mass media.

When comparing this theme against the "mass media role" discussed in the previous section, the impression is that there is a consistency between the informants' perception of mass media's portrayal of happiness and their perception of mass media as the institution driven by capitalistic agenda and materialism ideology. All informants give a rather uniform description of what mass media portrays as an image of happiness.

Given the mass media's affiliation with the materialism ideology, at least in these informants' perception, their descriptions of what mass media portrayed as happiness generally consists of material wealth, perfect and youthful physical appearances, perfect family, and social visibility. It should be noted that the term mass media used here should be inclusive of advertising, for the informants gave similar descriptions when they were asked in the mass media as well as the advertising contexts. Because each informant's description is remarkably similar to one another, only few descriptions are selected to illustrate the point.

When asked to describe what they see in the mass media as "an ideal image of happiness," these informants reported:

Pam:

> Richness...being rich,...um...being wealthy, being perfect, being...um...nothing wrong with us, that we have all these toys. Um...it would make us happy if we would have all these stuffs. Um...if we have perfect body, we have perfect foods, we have perfect truck, perfect SUV, perfect pair of pants. You know, that's what I think being portrayed through the media. That if we get all these stuffs, you will be happy.

Rita:

> I would say...a big house,...um...a lot of cars...expensive...not just one car...many expensive cars,...um...nice clothes, and...um...um...what you call it...attention...like a lot of...attention or fame, I guess you can call that. That...that's what I see...the media...see as the good life.

Jan:

> Money, youth, and good look,...um...yeah, I would say that would be the most important thing...in the media's point of view.

Brenda:

> Well, I the media very definitely try to present that the more things you own and buy, the happier you're gonna be... Yeah, having a big house, you know have a big house and buy your kids all these things, and then they will all be happy

Barbara:

> Money. Money and buying things, and being skinny, and...um...drinking alcohol, drinking coffee, eating certain foods,...um...driving fancy cars, having more possession. That's how they portray happiness.

To illustrate that the informants make similar statements in the context of advertising, the statements made by Pam, Jan, and Brenda are presented as follows:

Pam:

> The whole thing. Advertising and..., even the commercials that we hear on the radio, you know, these products will make you feel better. You know, if you use these pills, it's gonna help you lose weight and you will feel better. You know, all these things will make you feel better, just like alcohol...it's gonna make you feel better. If you buy this SUV, it's gonna make you feel better. But in reality is...once you get the SUV, you've got to pay for it. (Laugh.) You've got to get up everyday and go to work. And then...reality is, you know, how you're gonna pay for all these stuffs when you get it. If you are going to be happy, you know, I think a lot of us don't know what's the happiness is, so we turn to the media.

Jan:

> Having a big house, being a beautiful-looking person, dressing well, eating good food,...um...big smile on the face.

Brenda:

> What would make a person happy and fulfilled.... I think it's kind of the same thing that...if you buy...buy all these things, wonderful things that...that you will be happy. Buy...buy this wonderful looking car or if you buy this wonderful perfume or these clothes, you know, then...then you'll have the good life, and...and you will be happy.

Informants' Credulity of Mass Media's Portrayal of Happiness

The discussion about the informants' perception of the mass media institution and the messages it touts about how to be happy lead to this question: Does any informant believe in these messages proliferated in the mass media? The answer to this question is, "no," based on these three factors: 1) what informants say about the mass media as an institution; 2) the discrepancy of their ideas of happiness (*to be discussed in this section*) and what mass media portray as happiness; and 3) what informants say about how mass media portray reality. First, as noted, the informants' perceptions of the mass media

institution seem to suggest that they put minimal trust in this institution. After all, they see mass media as being driven by self-serving motives and tied to, if not controlled by, business enterprises. In short, in Symbolic Interactionism terminology, these informants are dubious about the underlying motivation of their interacting partner.

Second, most informants do not believe that having all the things prescribed by the mass media is the answer to what they come to see as real happiness. This consensus is best captured in Dorothy's statement as follows:

> I think they (the mass media) ...teach people to spend a whole lot of money on...clothes and...um...makeup, stuffs like that. And except for *Oprah's* show, and a few others...like her,...um...people don't really.... The media...um...doesn't send messages that...really help people really have healthier and happier life. They send message that help people spend money.

Real happiness, according to all but three informants, has more to do with one's ability to maintain close interpersonal relationships with others, to establish a spiritual connection with what one sees as the divine being, to unconditionally love oneself, and to find enjoyment in the simplicity of everyday living. True happiness, they maintain, is not achieved by the relentless act of assembling everything the mass media says one should have in order to be happy. To illustrate this point, a selection of statements made by five informants who obviously do not buy into the mass media's portrayal of happiness is presented. Pam, Jo, Brenda, Barbara, and Tina made the following statements when they were asked to describe what constitutes real happiness:

Pam:

> I'm gonna say it's probably good health, being with your family, doing things that you want to do, and the job. We learn from people in the recovery process that the job doesn't, you know. It's people in the job, the relationship in the job, you know.

Rita:

> I thought back then...that...if I can find...like my prince charming..., that would make my life...perfect.... And now what I think is just finding...my true self inside me. That will make everything perfect.

Brenda:

> I think that...um...I think that what's inside the person,...um...self-esteem, and I also think that spirituality is...um...important to happiness.

Barbara:

> I know if I could have bought happiness, I would have bought it already, and...happiness is found on the inside. You can hear that your whole life, but still never understand it. It's...it's very difficult to understand, you know, that...that having a baby, and getting married is gonna make you happy. Even having a happy home life will make you happy—no, it won't. Having God and having a spiritual life will make you happy.

Tina:

> Oh, in my own opinion...um...I guess for me,...um...it's like...feel good about yourself, no matter what's your weight...because when was really...thin and went to Overeater Anonymous, I was...I was probably...I was really miserable. I was as miserable as the people who were overweight. Because I was unhappy when I was thin...because it is a very...artificial way to live. It wasn't—I was concerned about...what I ate, what I didn't eat. And then if I binge, the next day I didn't even want to be...alive, and then, you know, because I felt so guilty, I felt so awful, and I felt so scared about becoming fat, and so...it was just...a...just a.... So...um...I guess...I...I.... So I think...that...my--what I think would make a person happy...is to have someone...feel okay...um...no matter how much they make, and no matter how fat or thin they are, and...um...that they have relationships, to have someone in their life. I guess that doesn't necessarily mean they have to have a partner, you know, just to have...um...friends who care about them and that they care about, you know, maybe some children or...extended family or...extended, you know, kinship or network—and a dog.

Unlike the rest on the informants, Debra, Jan, and Mary's ideas of happiness seem to be tied to worldly rather than spiritual matters. This is what they had to say when they were asked what would make them happy:

Debra:

> Infinite supply (of) everything....If I can buy anything I can think of, anytime I can think of it....Everything and all the shops that I can buy...anytime.

Mary:

> Um...(my) perfect fantasy would be to have a beautiful home with decorating like...what they have in the *Southern Living* magazine, and...um...have a full-time house keeper, and I wear clothes from Ann Taylor...all the time,...um...and the husband who wasn't...you know, we have a best friend

relationship, interested in the same thing,...um..., and I...I don't know, I have cool job...and that I don't have to work full time, you know.

Jan:

I haven't been (playing lottery), but...I think...I think if I won a million dollars, it would...it would solve the majority of my problem. I think it would help, especially right now....Um...I think...I think I'll be happier when I find the job and my husband find the job...and our money problems are settled. I think that will make me happy. Money has a lot to do with it. Money to me is security, and when my security is threatened, and then I am not happy.

Finally, the informants' statements about the way in which the mass media portray reality reveal that they are indeed cognizant of the unrealistic nature of mass media portrayals. These statements range from casually revealing mass media's portrayals as unreal to pinpointing the techniques used in the portrayals so that what is shown in the mass media is essentially a glorified version of reality. The statements made by Barbara, Jan, and Jane are the examples of the former type of statements. To Barbara, the whole myriad of mass media is simply a brainwashing agent of some sort. This interview excerpt shows Barbara's sentiment:

I. OK. Let's me read this to you. "Do you think people learn something by exposing to the media?"
R. Oh,...I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if they learn something. I don't...I don't like the mass media at all. I don't like, you know. It's so...it's so...um...political and so filtered, and when...when a person reads it, they think they're reading the truth, and I don't believe they are. I think it's lies and advertising, and I think they try to make people think certain way. I don't...I think it's very controlling. They're trying to control the people.
I. And that is just...consumption kind of thing?
R. Not just consumption, but I think they're trying to brainwash the people politically, financially, socially. I, you know, I don't think we have freedom of the press. I think it's very politically controlled.
I. Do you think they do that intentionally? I mean they know what they're doing?
R. Yeah, they know what they're doing. The people don't know what they're reading, but...the media know what they're doing.

Jan and Jane gave more specific statements about the discrepancy between what is portrayed in the media and what exists in reality. Jan's statement addresses the

discrepancy of the family image; Jane's statement is about the people's appearance. Both of their statements were made in the context of television.

Jan:

> Not every family lives like Austin Hariot's, which mean, you know, the children are beautiful, the parents are beautiful, they never yell at each other, they never fight, they never have argument. There's always plenty of money. That's what they...that's what they show, but it isn't the way it is.

Jane:

> I think TV is not real. They make it looks...like everybody should look like that or should be like that, and the real world doesn't like that.....The advertising makes people look.... You don't really know people that look like the advertisements. They don't look like the average person.

The more specific statements about how the mass media portray reality point to the notion that the mass media are not necessarily deceptive as Barbara suggested. Instead, they point to the notion of mass media's omissions of certain aspects of the truth. According to the informants in this study, what mass media tend to omit in their portrayals fall into three categories. The first category involves the characters, fictional and real, and their lifestyles that resemble the "real people." That is, many informants agree on the fact that the people in the media tend to be more socially and economically fortunate as well as more physically attractive than people they have known or come across in person. These three interview excerpts exemplify this category of omission.

Jan:

> I. OK. If you would look at the life-style, and, you know, the status of people, would you...can you compare that to the way...the media portray and the real world?
>
> R. Yeah, I would say that the media glamorize everything, just like the TV, and that the real world.... They don't have many...they don't have many stories except around this time of the year about people that need money, people that are asking for donation because their child need a liver transplant. Most of it is, you know, about millionaire, and movie stars, and the trips they take, and...and wonderful things. In the real world, it isn't exactly that way. People save for years and years to go...to go on a small vacation, but we don't hear about thing like this.

Rita:

I. OK. How do you feel about the mass media?
R. Oh, I have mixed feelings the media?
I. OK. Can you tell me about...them?
R. Um...I get...I get really upset. The one way, I feel...as I get very upset as how...um...they portray women, and...the whole fact that...so many women and young girls think like...they have to be thin. Um...that's the whole...media-induced...problem. We shouldn't even have that problem. It's because the media that we have that problem, and...um...so in one respect, I really hate how they treat women on TV, but in the other respect, I like TV, because you can get so much across to so many people...so fast. It's an incredible medium...to spread information on. I hate it that sometimes they use to exploit...people, not just women. They...they just...right exploit people...on TV.
I. In what way that...you think that they exploit people...both men and women?
R. Because the way that they portray men and women...on TV and in the movies that...make the general population...believe that...that's they way they're supposed to be, and if they are not like that,...then...something's wrong with them, and...I...I want them to...show different kinds of people. Everybody on TV always look...perfect, and...people in the real world don't look perfect.

Mary:

I. OK. How about the images that being portrayed in the media...do you have any concern about that?
R. Yeah, the sensuality that I'm worried about, and I'm worried about...like Victoria's Secret ads that have women with panties or something. Um...I guess the main concern is that...what it does to women's images. It's like...because, you know, what percentage of the women in this country have body like that, and...like the girls growing up, they compare themselves to these. I mean how many naked bodies do you see? Not very many, right? The naked bodies you do see are the bodies like that are perfect. And so girls growing up, they are going to these women in these Victoria's Secret naked bodies, and I think it hurts girls' self-images. I think it's...it's sad because it hurts our images, and we think our bodies are not pretty because they don't look like that. But you know, I..., in *Ms* magazine, few months ago, they had a painted nude woman, and this woman is like...older. And I...I looked at that and I like to look at that, because it was like...it was just being in touch with being a women and not just the image that is the...unrealistic...sexual image, you know, that they do to women's bodies in the media.

The second category of what is omitted in the media is the undesirable consequences of such reckless behaviors and showing the life-styles as meaningless

sexual relations, violent behaviors, and overspending, especially via the use of credit cards. Two interview excerpts exemplify this category of omission.

Jan:

> I. OK. Is there anything about advertising that concerns you...besides being annoying?
> R. Well, the influence that they have on our young people. Violence. Sex. You know, the spending...the spending of money whether they have it or not, you know. The glamorization. I mean, you know,...um...they make compulsive spender out of people.
> I. How so? I mean how they make compulsive spender out of...?
> R. Because they glamorize, you know. Buy now, pay later, you know. Two percent interest on the car for the first (laugh) sixty days, then twenty percent, you know. The credit cards. How about all the craps and the junk mail we get on credit cards. You pay 2 percent interest rate now for...six month, and then they go up to twenty, but the 2 percent is so attractive that...that people take it. And then...when it's twenty percent, all the sudden they are not getting these advertisements. They get another one they have to switch again.

Pat:

> I. Now I go back to question on the mass media, OK? Is there anything in the mass media that concerns you?
> R. Are we pertaining to shopping?
> I. Um...anything.
> R. I think there is a lot of violence on television.
> I. How about something that pertains to shopping?
> R. Well, I just think we are in real materialistic society, and I have a hard time with how they publicize...um...credit cards on TV. Um....
> I. How do you think they publicize that?
> R. Well, they talk about...the wonderful things...the wonderful way your life can be if you get a VISA charge card, or...um...another thing I have a hard time with is how they...um...publicize McDonald hamburger. You know...they...they talk about what a wonderful restaurant that is. What they show is a healthy son and his father going in after a football game to get a hamburger. What they don't show are the thousand of people that are driving to the driving window, weigh 400 lbs, buying food that could feed three people, and the people ending up eating all themselves--do you know what I mean? They don't show that part if. They don't show the addicted people who go to McDonald.

The last category of what tends to be omitted in the media is the mundane details of how people interact with one another in a relationship. Because the time and the space in the mass media world are limited, only the parts of the story that can easily

communicate the plot line are presented. In other words, what is portrayed in the media, according to a few informants in this study, tends to be a slice of life that is more extreme in one way or another, especially in terms of emotional expressions. The consequence of this omission is not necessarily a minor issue. Rita, Meg, and Barbara are the three informants who mentioned this type of omission. They say, in essence, such omission has given them an unrealistic impression of how people live and relate to one another. For Barbara, this unrealistic impression has in the past contributed to her lack of communication skills necessary to maintain a healthy intimate relationship. These interview excerpts contain Rita, Meg, and Barbara's observations of this type of omission.

Rita:

> I. Oh, OK. Let's see. You said that the mass media portray men and women as perfect, do they portray the other aspects of the...men and women or life that are not real?
> R. I think...they portray them as...much more materialistic than the way people really are.
> I. Can you give me example?
> R. Well, there is much more that happens in real life...that deal with people's feelings, and...on TV, they don't show people's feelings. They...they deal with events. The deal with...um...plot line, but they don't...they don't bring people's feeling...in to the stories. Sometimes I see something, and I think why did that person do that, and...no one has any idea why the person did that, because...it wasn't important to the story, and...that's the thing I don't like...that.... You know, there might be something that happens to somebody that is kind of boring..., but they don't put that on TV, but that's what happens to people in real life.

Meg:

> I. What concerns you about shows like Dawson Creek, Friend...?
> R. They are not real. It's not real.
> I. In what aspect? Can you give example
> R. Well, in how people relate, first of all. And...I mean it's just not real. All these things are...I mean there is no real feeling that is going on. Uh...everybody looks perfect, unless they are supposed to being sick, then they look terrible. Even then they still look good. All the time they wore makeup. Uh...everybody behaves perfectly. Everything is well, or else real traumatic...oh, my God...you know...it didn't go well. But even then they still make it.... I think they kind of romanticize everything. And I do that myself. I learn to do that. Seven Heaven...I love that show, but it's so corny in some way how mom and dad

act. They have like six...six or seven kids, and they...they're just like smiling. Everything...in 30 minutes...everything turns out perfect. So...and...uh...you've got somebody like Ricky Lake or...you know...that people are screaming at each other, ripping each other apart. That's not real. It's not okay. There is not limit...no standard. I...I don't think...what's really missing is really...and I...I continually striving for...uh...realness. How can I be useful and helpful? How can do the next best thing? What is the next best thing that I can do. How can I be helpful and not...do harm? And...you know...and sometimes I watched these things to be entertained, but I'm afraid. I am experiencing with my son. He started to lie around and watch all day long, and it has...it has a very profound effect on...reality.

Barbara:

I. OK. Now, do you think the media, from what you read or what you see, has any influence on your life?

R. Yeah, I do, I think. I don't know...I don't know what the influences are, but I was bombarded with TV. I mean I was watching like ten hours a day, eight to ten hours a day for years, and it must have affected me. I think it affected me in a way that I...I didn't know how to think for myself. I think I just learn what they taught me on TV. They taught me what to buy, what to do, what to...how to react. You know, in those situation comedies, there is always this female that...that play stupid or hard to get, or something, and that isn't real in the relationship.

I. Yeah. Has you become that way, you know, hard to get or...?

R. Yeah. They called it acting out. I do a lot of acting out, and...um...

I. Does it hurt the past relationships?

R. Does it hurt them? Yeah. I...I think I did a lot of acting out. I...I was, you know, acting like...those TV people, and...and not understand the truths about my relationship. Now I do what I want to do. Now I look at the relationship...me and my boyfriend...we decide what's right for us.

I. Can you...um...can you give me example of...acting out?

R. Well, like...um...it's hard to give an example, but...I guess.... Like my fiancé twenty years ago, you know, I may be get mad and...storm out of the room, and then I would expect him to come running after me, you know that kind of things.

I. Does that come from romantic novel?

R. Come from situation comedies, like *I-Love-Lucy* kind of stuffs, you know, and that's not real. I should...I should have communicated with him, and told him how I was feeling, and what was going on rather than just storming out of the room. That's ridiculous.

Mass Media's Mediating Roles in Compulsive Buying Behaviors

These women's ability to discern the unrealistic nature of mass media portrayals suggest that whatever they see in the media as a recipe for happiness is irrelevant to their obsession with acquiring things. However, two factors inhibit the "no effect" conclusion of sort. First, it must be remembered that not only have these women recognized the problem, they also are already in the recovery program for it. Jane, the one person who is not in DA, has already seen a psychotherapist about the problem. Every time these women attend a DA meeting, they either volunteer to read aloud or listen to a DA principle warning them to be vigilant of the mass media messages. Thus, the seemingly lack of credulity among these women toward the mass media's recipe for happiness is not necessarily a surprise. Furthermore, these women may simply be just like the many "normal" people who make a casual remark on the unrealistic nature of mass media portrayals. Whichever the case, it seems premature at this point to conclude that mass-mediated communications do not have anything to do with these women's buying behavior. Secondly, there are a number of themes in the interview transcripts suggesting that these women's experiences with mass media are not totally irrelevant to their obsession with acquiring material things. The catalogs of such statements will be presented in this section.

In order to make this categorization purposeful for assessing whether mass media has anything to do with compulsive buying behavior, a number of concepts from the mass media effect literature are used to guide the process. These concepts are short-term effects, long-term effects, third-person effects, the role of interpersonal connections, and para-social comparison. The results of the categorization are presented here.

Short-Term Effect of Mass Media's Portrayals on Compulsive Buying

Based on these women's accounts, it is safe to say that a person who is prone to compulsive buying can be quite vulnerable to the temptation of mass-mediated stimuli, provided that these stimuli are appealing to this person's interest. It is noteworthy, however, that falling into the temptation does not always mean taking an immediate shopping trip. This obsession could culminate in an actual purchase, but not always. What these women tend to suffer from is what could be called "an obsession of the mind"

over what they see or hear to engage in shopping-related activities. These activities could be desiring the things they see, making an impulse purchase, going shopping after being exposed to discount advertising, searching for and mulling over merchandise information, thinking around certain styles or colors of merchandise, or being obsessed with collecting coupons and then with thinking about how these coupons will help save money. Methodologically speaking, the statements addressing any of these topics are grouped under the "short-term effects" theme. These are the examples of such statements.

■ *Having desire for products*

Barbara:

I OK. Do you think that advertising has any influence on your life?
R. Sure. I'm human. I still get influenced by it.
I. OK. How about your shopping habit?
R. No.
I. Why not?
R. Um....
I. You know, I'm talking about in the past.
R. In the past, definitely.
I. OK. Can you give me example?
R. Oh, you know, if I...especially flipping through the magazines like at the beauty parlor, I don't buy them, but if I'm at the beauty parlor and I see jewelry ad...jewelry ad...they're just....oh, they're just so beautiful.
I. OK. Would that make you feel anxious?
R. Yeah, anxious is a good word. It makes me feel anxious, kind of lonely...like I can't afford it, you know. Those are very expensive.

Brenda:

R. But for the commercials...I just...tend to tune it out or try to tune it out,...um...but I...I probably react more to...magazine advertising...like...I...I like the...ads in *The New Yorkers*. I've some of the clothes and jewelry. I like...I look at those ads. I probably response to more ads in magazines than I do...like I occasionally buy *Vogue* or some of the women's magazines.
I. What do you mean by...response to the ad in the magazines...what do you mean by response?
R. Um...wish I had it, and...if it's...um...within...my, you know, if I can afford it, I...might order it.

Jan:

I. OK. Do you think that, based on your experience, do the mass media affect you?
R. You mean now?
I. No. When you think you can afford them.
R. Yeah. Let...let's say...um...they show the...um.... They show a beautiful home...on the television. They have the show where they show the stars...the movie stars' housed, and they show you the different things in the houses—the furniture or accessories, and I see that, and I think that, "Oh, that's beautiful. I love to have that." Or, let's say the star has a...one of those fountains that they put in their house, table-top fountain. And I might see something like that, and I say, "Oh, I have to have one of those. I just love it."
I. Would that actually make you buy it or look for it?
R. It might.

■ *Making impulse purchases*

Rita:

I. OK. Now, do you think that the mass media...used to or have any influence on your Shopping habits?
R. It did...a lot.
I. OK.
R. Because I was like...I would see a commercial, and I would want to go out. I was actually very...um...I was probably in advertisers' dream, (laugh) because I would see a commercial and I would want to run out and go get it, and there were a couple of time when they have this commercial...call now, I called. (Laugh.) There were people that said, "Call now," and I called, and I ordered something...like...most of the time, it was like a videotape...for something. Like I see movie on TV, and they say you can order this by..."To order this videotape, call now," and I would call and charge, and get a copy, when all I have to do is tape it...on TV, but I wanted it like...good one.

Debra:

I. Have you buy anything from the catalog at all?
R. Yeah, not from that particular catalog, though. I send off for many catalogs.
I. Are they in brail?
R. No. That's one reason I don't buy more stuffs. I want to keep these. I want to have somebody to look through it, and until they look through it with me, I don't necessarily buy. It's not that I'm not captured by the idea of buying it, but maybe I don't actually get to do it as much as I would if I can sit down and look at catalog when it came. I'm now looking at things to go with...um...tape recorder. Well, you can do it anyway you want to do it. It's called a bionic ear.

■ *Going shopping after exposure to discount advertising*

Tina:

I. OK. Do...you...um...do you think that...um...mass media have...anything to do with...um...your shopping habits? I mean...not just the way that...you look at...happiness or the way that....

R. Yeah. I mean...there are so many phrases that, you know, can kind of trigger me...like.... One of my triggers is when...they say, you know, "There is an additional fifty percent off clearance." So when they say that, you know, I'm gonna go there and get something cheap. (Laugh.)

I. OK. (Laugh.)

R. And then... "One day only." You know, if the sale is only one day, then I feel like...um,...you know. That puts pressure on me to...make a decision to go or not...go because of the time—there is a limited time. Um...things like... "While supplies last" will make me feel like...I have to get there and get something right away.

Jane:

I. OK. What kind of mass media you use now?

R. I still read magazines, but I don't get newspapers anymore.

I. How come?

R. Because I would see advertisements, and I would go see. I had a tremendous problem with this shopping. It was so bad that I would see an ad, and we have to go. I have to go. I have to go shop. Now, my son is the same way. So, if we have the newspaper, we would spend more money.

■ *Searching for more merchandise information*

Pam:

I. How do you feel about the mass media...generally?

R. I don't care for it.

I. How so?

R. Well, you know, I try to practice the principle of Debtor Anonymous, and one of my principles is that I have to stay away from it.

I. Why do you feel you have to stay away from it?

R. Oh, you have to stay away from advertisements. They are predators. Part of the...I believe part of the program or part of the process is to stay away from it as much as possible, just like an alcoholic stays away from the bar.

I. You mean just the advertising from credit cards or something else too?

R. I think, at this point in my recovery, I think everything has influence on me right down to...um.... Like I'm looking for a new bed for my bedroom. I'm working on my husband right now. Him and I are trying to discuss what kind of bed you want to get, you know, how much you want to spend for it,...that kind of stuffs. I see the stuffs in the newspaper, and I just have an addiction to pick that

up, and go out there and look it over and analyze it, you know, and get...pick up that high again. I can get high on this. Thinking of how to, you know, how to take this thing right down to the...bedroom, you know. I keep thinking about this, you know. "How much money you want to spend on it?" "How many stores we want to go to see this thing?" So it's like an insanity. But today I'm looking at it and like, "Okay, how important is it?" If I pick up this newspaper and read it and leave it here. The same with the Internet. The Internet is full of it. You can't even click on your bank statement unless you're bombarded by media. I can't go click e-mail and not be completely bombarded by media.

■ *Thinking around certain styles or colors of merchandise*

Jan:

I. Can you be more specific about...which aspects of reality that...you...you be influenced by advertising?

R. Oh, here...here is one real...real...simple shallow way. If I'm looking at a fashion magazines with a lot clothes in it, everything is white and red, my mind tells me that what they are showing this year, and I'm gonna go out.... When I feel like buying something, I'm gonna out and buy something perhaps just white and red. Or, you know, when they were showing the...the shorter pant, a knee length, when I go to the store, that's what I'm gonna be looking for. So, yes, they do influence me...for the fashion.

■ *Being obsessed with collecting coupons and then with thinking about how these coupons will help saving money*

Pam:

I. OK. How about foods...were you influenced by what you see in the media then?

R. Foods that I see on papers?

I. Yeah.

R. Yes. There were ads from grocery stores. They were black and white. I know color came out probably in 80s. You know, I didn't start paying attention to the paper until...we started the grocery store in our area. I had what they called "Double Coupon."

I. (Laugh.) That's a good reason to pay attention to....

R. (Laugh.)

I. So you looked for coupons, right?

R. Yeah, we looked for the coupons. So we go through the papers, and we clipped out the coupons. I would get ready for my mom because I would spend her money on the foods or my own money for the foods for the house. I would get the coupons and she would give thirty, forty bucks for the foods, and I would do all the shopping because I was working at the grocery store anyway.

I. For a week?

R. Yeah, thirty, forty dollars for a week, and at that time we have four or five people lived in the house, compared to ten. We had all those people. They moved out, graduated, or they died. (Laugh.) So sad. We can laugh about it today, but.... Now, coupons are probably the most mass media that I was attracted to. (Laugh.) At the store, they doubled the coupon. You got the items free. You would go in there with the addiction, "Oh, I need it. I need it. I need it. I need it."

I. You mean when you got the coupon, you think you need the thing?

R. I get high.

I. Really!?

R. Yeah, you get high. "Oh, man, I can get this for thirty-nine cents with the double coupon."

I. But you need the thing to start with, right?

R. No, you wouldn't. No. You just think that you need it. You would think that if you could get this thing for thirty-nine cents, then you'd better pick it up, and you think someway down the road you might need it. It was, you know, junky foods...like, for instance, it is just a bunch of sugar in there, salt in there, or something. You got if for thirty-nine cents, with double the coupon. Regularly, hot-dog was fifty-nine cents. You know, you're gonna go for it. You're gonna buy it even though you don't need it.

Informants' Meanings of Mass Media's Portrayals and Compulsive Buying

It is rather simple to see the ways in which the informants are influenced, on a short-term basis, by what they see or hear in the media. As illustrated in the previous section, the informants can readily recount how they are vulnerable to certain mass-mediated stimuli. It is not as simple, however, to assess a more profound influence the mass media might have on these women's buying behavior. While many of these women acknowledged that they might have been influenced somehow by the mass media, they could not be more specific as to how it happened. These interview excerpts illustrate a lack of clarity in their statements about how mass the media might have influenced them.

Debra:

I. OK. Um...let's see. Do you think the mass media has any influence on your life besides having you impulsively buy something?

R. Well, I am sure it does. Sometimes I guess it's so subtle that I...entirely know of being influenced, but I'm sure that I'm the product of...where I live...of what that was going on. I don't think that all of the buying that I do that are impulsive are the mass media. The mass media can give you the important information to make wise decision about what to buy, what not to buy, and...um.... I don't know. I don't know if I answer that question.

Pam:

I. Do you think, even though you don't know it exactly...do you think watching TV has anything to do with your...shopping?
R. Um...it most likely did some. It could have exposed myself, you know, I'm sure it did something to me.
I. Can you specify any?
R. I don't think I can. It must be that.... We did a lot of talking in my house. (Laugh.) We had a lot of people in my house. The night...it was the nighttime thing, you know. TV would be on at night. The news...there was a lot of news...a lot of news was always on. My mother and grandfather always said to me to watch the news, because...to find out what's going on in the world. It's important that we know what's going on there. Um...the shows that were on like *Archie Bunk*er...those types of shows...um..., and the commercials were, again, not like today. So I would definitely say.... You know, we weren't totally influenced by it, but there is some influence there.

Brenda:

I. OK. When you watch those kind of soaps, I know that these people are...kind of attractive, very trendy, and...would you say that any of what you watch in soap operas has any...anything to do with your shopping experience?
R. Um...yeah, actually, probably. Come to think of it, it might somewhat...as far as clothes...that kind of stuffs goes. It probably influences me not so much...consciously, but...looking at it now, probably at subconscious level. That may influence, you know, the kind of clothes, the styles and stuffs.

The above interview excerpts illustrate a lack of clarification in these informants' discussion of how mass media might have influenced them. Nevertheless, the fact that some informants did acknowledge the possibility of being influenced by the mass media--not necessarily in terms of the short-term temptation—suggests that the effects the mass media have had on these women may be more profound. An additional implication of the long-term effects comes from a number of statements made by the informants that are categorized under the theme called "third-person effects." The statements represent these informants' concerns for other people, especially children, about their ability to differentiate the reality from its counterpart portrayed in the media. The aspects of reality that are of concern among these informants are physical appearance and spending. Given the informants' concerns for other people being affected by the mass media on these issues, it is hard to resist wondering if their concerns for others are indeed a reflection of

their own experiences. The statements belonging to the "third-person effects" theme are illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

Barbara:

> I. OK. You said that people now that they don't think for themselves, can you be more...like specific on that?
> R. Well,...um...I think...they just they're supposed to grow up, get married, have a baby. They go to the grocery stores. They buy the things they see advertised on TV...um, you know. They don't read as much as...people did years ago. Um...they don't talk to their friends. They get so much their input through the media...of how to live and what to buy. They are not thinking on their own, you know.

Jan:

> I. OK. Are you saying that they don't portray...the...real people? I mean the majority of people.
> R. Yeah. That's the very good thing to say, and these TV shows that are on...they really don't portray...real...real people. It is kind of...idealized.
> I. OK. What would be...bad about that?
> R. Well, for me as a...somewhat intelligent, I realize that this is the way it is, but like...a...how about the way news and the different TV shows...um...influence teenagers, and young adults. I mean some of them don't know any differences, you know. They think the stuff is true, and...and it really isn't.

Meg:

> I. Okay. Uh...is there anything else about the media that concern you besides about the health issue?
> R. Uh...the violent and...sex, especially to children. Also, marketing of unhealthy products. We don't...you know...and I...this is weakness on my part, but actually years ago I wish I would have not...I wish I have gotten rid of television, because...uh...I really know that...on some level, it has been a very unhealthy thing to have my child exposed to...uh...the attitudes. We think it's funny or we think it's clever, but it really...it really...it really really...is not...in that level.

Pam:

> I. Is there anything about the media that concerns you in particular?
> R. Um...the sex part of it. That concerns me, but that could be an old-fashion thing, you know. Um...what else concern me...what it will do to children.
> I. What kind of thing you think it can do to children...besides the sex thing?
> R. Um...the addiction and also the shopping. "Why can't I have that item?" "Why can't I have this?" "What is that I'm doing right that I can't afford this?" "Why can't I have that new item that they are advertising?" "Why can't I have

> that brand new PC" "Why can't I have those Limited Too jeans?" "Why isn't that...what is it that I'm not good enough...to get that stuff?" And that is what I'm afraid it's gonna influence my kids.

Note that the concerns these women have for other people are about the type of influence that is beyond the short-term temptation by specific stimuli. Nevertheless, these expressions of concerns for other people should not be regarded as a conclusive evidence of the informants themselves being influenced by the mass media in a similar manner. Such conclusion calls for more direct evidence, and one such evidence will be presented in this section. This evidence is in the form of the informants' discussions of how they associated what they see in the media with the meanings they make, or used to make, about their own lives. These discussions appear in a number of interview excerpts categorized into the "long-term effects" theme. Before presenting them, the following notation has to be made about the other two themes identified in the interview transcripts. The first theme addresses the informants' tendency for para-social comparison with what they see in the media; the second theme addresses the collaborate influence of interpersonal and mass communications on the informants' meanings.

■ *The informants' tendency for para-social comparison*

It is not uncommon for these women to compare themselves against the people portrayed in the mass media and advertising, mostly in terms of physical appearances. This is based on Rita, Mary, Dorothy, Jane, and Tina's discussions. Two informants, Rita and Pam, also discussed this type of comparison in terms of socio-economic status. The informants' discussions of how they compare themselves against what is portrayed in the media are categorized as "para-social comparison." The comparisons generally result in these informants seeing themselves as being inferior to those portrayed in the media. In other words, the characters and the lifestyles that are portrayed in the mass media and advertising become the standards these women compare themselves against. These two interview excerpts illustrate the "para-social" comparisons the informants make in terms of physical appearance and of socio-economic status respectively.

Tina:

> It's really easy to notice that...most of the TV anchor women...are thin, and I think, you know, "How can these people be thin with all the stuffs that they

have to do?" Um...and I notice that...heavy people...are less represented, and..., even in Lifetime TV, you know, the majority of women there are...thin and taller, you know, like I said, I'm four-eleven. So they are thinner and taller and beautiful and.... So, yeah, I guess it kind of makes me feel like...if you are not thin and attractive and beautiful, then you are not significant.

Rita:

They would portray...this is the way life is, and I.... Since my life wasn't like that, and I felt like...that I was the one...that didn't belong, and that...everybody else has all these things, and have this kind of life, and I was the only one that didn't.

■ *The collaborate influences of interpersonal and mass communications*

These informants do not see these standards as an invention of mass media and advertising organizations. According to these informants, these standards already exist in the culture in which mass media and advertising organizations operate. In the interview excerpts categorized as "interpersonal influences on worldviews," many informants indicate that they have learned about these standards from someone they know personally. These two interview excerpts illustrate the combined influence of interpersonal and mass communications on the informants' worldview.

Rita:

I. ...Can you define...what do you mean by the elite group?

R. Um...they are...people who make...who live in very nice, large houses, and make a lot of...and make enough money to be able to...go on vacation, drive a nice car, belong to a country club...um doctor, lawyer.

I. OK. Where...OK...can you tell me generally where do you get the idea about this? I mean...how do you learn now this is the elite group?

R. Um...there were.... I was in Catholic school when I was growing up, and there were different classes of people at this Catholic school, and...there were some families that I knew. I knew where they lived, and they had big houses, and...you can tell on Sunday when we go to the churches that they had nicer clothes, so I started...getting the impression...very young when I saw families that didn't look like our family....And also I think just from the media and television and movies, you saw...you can tell the differences between the people who had money and people who didn't.

I. Um...how would you compare...you said that you see what is in real life and what comes from the media, which one seems to have more impact on your thinking about it?

R. Um...I think...I think the family and the church that I sent to. Seeing it first hand has more of an impact than the movies. That didn't seem like real life.

Debra:

I. OK. Um…you said that the mass media say that if you have more money you will be happy, and you told me that…your mom told you that if you have money you can buy anyone…I mean…you think that which one is more influential to you?
R. I think the two of them. I don't know if I can separate it. My mother's influence was more important at the beginning, and…I guess if she was the only one espousing it…then I can really say well it's my mother or peculiarity of her, you know. But the media…confirm what she said. You know, it's like my mother think this, and everybody else think it too.
I. OK. Um…let's me ask you this. Um…how much do you think the mass media account for…your buying habits?
R. Ah…a lot. (Laugh) I can't assign the number to it…eighty percent. (Laugh) I mean…if I don't hear about it, then I don't know it's there. But I can probably find out about it…before I go shopping for it. Sometimes it's not the mass media but it was a friend who said that, 'Hey, there is something you might be interested in.' But even then sometimes it's mass media. It's just indirect. I mean my cousin read about it and called me up and said you ought to find out about. I don't know. I think it's a lot. I just don't know how much.

As noted, the clearest indication of the long-term influence of mass media and advertising portrayals on these informants appears in their discussions of how they have associated the meanings of these portrayals into the meanings of their lives. The forgoing discussion of the "para-social comparison" theme provides a glimpse into the process in which some informants relate what they see in mass media and advertising with how they understand themselves and the meanings of their lives. Implicit in these statements is the subjective nature of a person's information processing of mass media and advertising portrayals. This subjectivity, as suggested by some statements categorized into the "interpersonal influence on worldviews" theme, can be a contribution of this person's previous social interactions with others. For these women interviewed for this study, this "subjectivity" of how they have related what is portrayed in the media seems to be associated with how they were brought up.

Because the informants' understandings of what is portrayed in the media are situated within the context of their life experience, it seems pertinent at this point to

explore how some of these informants relate the meanings of mass-mediated portrayals to the meanings of their lives. Methodologically, this exploration will be on the informants' statements categorized into the "long-term effects" theme. Recall from the earlier discussion in this chapter that four types of compulsive buyer are identified as the Provider, the Striver, the Abused, and the Neglected. Regardless of which type of compulsive buyer they belong to, all informants have low self-esteem. They all have thought of themselves as inadequate in their own right as a human being. Their statements categorized into the "long-term effects" theme suggest that they tend to bring this sense of inadequacy into their interpretation of what mass media and advertising promote as the answer to their search for a sense of self worth and happiness. Because these informants see that mass media and advertising promote that, this answer essentially lies in material wealth, physical beauty, and perfect family image: some of them used to believe that their lack of these components was the explanation of their sense of inadequacy, unhappiness, or both.

There is not enough information at this point to conclude that there is a link between a compulsive buying type and a certain way of interpreting mass media and advertising portrayals. Nevertheless, the statements made by many informants suggest that their interpretations of these portrayals do correspond to what they deem important in their lives. These informants, perhaps like everybody else, are in search of happiness. There has been a pattern of belief among these informants that before they can be happy, they have to have the components that mass media and advertising suggest as the answer to happiness. This general belief, according to some informants' statements, can be related to their buying behavior. Although no definitive conclusion can be made here about the connection between a compulsive buyer type and a certain way of interpreting mass media and advertising portrayals, it is useful for further investigation to describe the nature of interpretation in light of each type of compulsive buyers.

■ *The Striver's interpretations of mass-mediated portrayals*

As noted, social status is a core meaning in the lives of the informants identified as the Striver. These informants are Rita, Mary, Jan, and Debra. A few statements made by these informants suggest that they see the people and the lifestyles portrayed in the

media as a confirmation of what they also learn from the real world, that is, what kind of living standard they should have in order to be happy. Rita, who is in her late 40s, has believed almost all her life that her unhappiness is at least partly a result of her not having the material wealth people in the "elite" group have. It has only been in the year prior to the interview that she realized that her happiness is dependent on her perception:

> R. I used to feel like I was missing out on something if I didn't buy the things that they would say to buy in the commercials. There was something missing...in my life, and I really wasn't...happy, even if I thought I was, um...because I didn't have these things, and I started...feeling like I was missing out...of having a happy life.
> I. OK. Now, is that...do you...does watching the TV programs...I mean not the TV commercials, you know, like...all the TV drama or something like that...?
> R. Um...sometimes, I think, yeah. I got it...personally, I got it more from...the commercials, but I think I also got it from the TV commer.... Well, actually, no. Come to think of it, it was more like fifty-fifty, because a lot of the TV shows...um...that I used to watch...that I like at a time, they would portray...this is the way life is, and I.... Since my life wasn't like that, and I felt like...that I was the one...that didn't belong, and that...everybody else has all these things, and have this kind of life, and I was the only one that didn't.
> I. You mean...everybody in reality...did you believe they have that kind of life?
> R. I used to, yeah.
> I. Really!?
> R. Yeah. Well, see I grew up very poor, and so...as I was growing up, I believe that everybody...a lot of people have more than I did, (laugh) and it was a fact, you know, and so...as I got older, I thought...I just kept...perpetuating the same thing, "Oh, it must still be that way." I was still not having.... I was still trying to catch up...kind of catch up with the rest of the world.

Of the four informants in this group, Rita shows the most progress as far as recovery goes. She indicates that she is able to adhere to her spending plans and has no desire to shop as much as she used to. This is perhaps why she is able to provide a more thorough analysis than the other three informants of how she used to be and what she has become. When asked whether they have been in anyway influenced by the media, the other informants generally mention how their buying behavior has been guided by the materialism ideology promoted in the media. Mary, for example, is driven by the image of status portrayed in the media.

I. Can you compare the way...advertising and the content part of the mass media in...influencing your shopping habits?
R. Advertising tells me about...where to go...to get stuffs, and...stuffs like that. They both...influence me in terms of images, the images that make me want stuffs,...um...and advertisement...gives me more of immediate things, you know, like what store I can go get things, you know, those image-producing items. The media, like the TV shows..., you know, some of the fashion magazine articles, they will make me..., you know, the images are there, and in the advertising too, but...um...what the advertising does is...to show me...where I can go...buy that things, you know, the place or store I can go buy that things that I want to create that image. It gives me more specific and what the price is and what the sale is.
I. OK. Do you know generally what kind of images you want to create?
R. Um...the images of the...um..., you know, the beautiful clothes, you know, the woman that looks successful and beautiful and has nice clothes, have the beautiful home and has friends around her, loving family around her,...that kind of things.

Debra is driven by a desire for intellectual and career achievements. At one point during the interview, she briefly mentioned how she can be persuaded by advertising that appeals to one's success and intelligence.

■ *The Provider's interpretations of mass-mediated portrayals*

There are two informants in the Provider category. These are Pam and Dorothy. Pam has been a member of DA for 3 years. She has shown much progress as far as recovery goes. Like Rita, she adheres to her spending plan most of the time and has no desire to hoard groceries or go overboard buying things for her children as she used to. Dorothy, on the other hand, has been in DA for one year. As far as recovery goes, she is at the stage where she realizes that she does not have financial discipline when it comes to her own money. Her limited spending at the time of the interview seems to be a result of her financial limitation. Both Dorothy and Pam used to spend excessively on their children. Dorothy, who grew up in a family with domestic violence, had an unhappy childhood. She observed that shopping was one of the things that relieved her mother from constant unhappiness. She carries on a similar scheme of association between having material things and being happy in her interpretation of mass-mediated portrayals.

I. OK. The fact that you concern about what it will do to the children...was that...because...it has anything to do with your own experience?
R. Um....
I. Another words, are you tempted by that yourself?

> R. Um...I would say that I was, because then there were commercials about...trucks and cars and clothes, you know. We didn't have much, but I would say to myself, "Why can't I have all that?" "I'm poor because of this and I'm gonna make sure that my kids will not be like this." And that's what happened to me went to the extreme by saying, "Okay, if I can't have all these stuffs, then my kids are gonna have it." And that is what we are facing with this generation now. A lot of parents in the 60s and 70s cannot give their kids everything, and guess what...we reverse it. We are at the other end of it now. We are giving them too much. And now we've got to slow down, we've got to save for retirement. We have to take care of ourselves because all these kids aren't gonna take care of us. (Laugh.) Unlike other cultures, your culture or the India's culture, where people take care of old people.

Pam did not mention any link between material things and being happy in the context of her own experience as Dorothy did. Nevertheless, she did discuss how her exposure to the myriad of material things portrayed in the media has contributed to her determination to provide for her children so that they do not experience material deprivation as she herself did.

■ *The Abused's and the Neglected's interpretations of mass-mediated portrayals*

There appears no distinguishable pattern of how the informants in the Abused and the Neglected categories associate the meanings of mass-mediated portrayals to the meanings of their lives. The informants in the Abused category are Meg and Brenda. Those in the Neglected category are Barbara, Pat, Tina, and Jane. Social status or financial security does not seem to be a core meaning in the lives of these informants. These informants are similar in that they grew up receiving little or no affection and attention from their parents. Not surprisingly, they see themselves as essentially unloved and unworthy. While the Striver and the Provider associate their sense of self-worth through the attainment of certain social and economical status, the Abused and the Neglected tend to strive for other people's approval. Such people could be identifiable individuals in their lives or unspecified others. It is obvious from these informants' discussions that they grew up with parents who had behavioral or emotional problems of their own. Nevertheless, these informants tend to attribute their sense of unworthiness to their perceived lack of certain personal characteristics they believe they need to have. These characteristics generally evolve around their physical appearances as well as their

femininity. These characteristics, as discussed earlier, are mentioned in these informants' discussions of what mass media and advertising portray as the ingredient for happiness. The following statement made by Meg about what used to be a priority in her life exemplifies the point.

> I...I'm continually striving for...uh...realness. How can I be useful and helpful? How can do the next best thing. What is the next best thing that I can do. How can I be helpful and not...do harm. Uh...before that I pretty much thought mostly about how I looked...how I looked...you know...my makeup, my earrings, my clothes, whether I had a decent car. Uh...they are all pretty superficial. I also struggled a lot...always, emotionally,...wanting...a relation...you know...healthy relationship with my husband, and...I knew it wasn't. He wasn't.... So those are my focus...you know...to try to get him to pay me more attention.

The statements concerning the relationship of how they associate the meanings of mass-media portrayals to the meanings of their lives are limited for the informants in the Abused and the Neglected categories. Meg, Brenda, Barbara, and Pat said in effect that they may have been influenced somehow by mass media, but did not offer any detail of how mass media may influence them in the long run. When they were asked to give an example, they would mention the influence of mass media and advertising stimuli on their impulse to buy. Tina did make a comment that could be classified as the association of meanings of mass media portrayals and her life meaning. The main issue for Tina seems to have always been body weight. She has been overweight for the most part of her life. She felt discouraged by her mother's casual comments while she was growing up. Nevertheless, she did indicate several times during the interview how the majority of slim females' bodies portrayed in the media have contributed to her negative attitude toward her body, which in turn leads to her diminished sense of self-worth.

> I. OK. Anything else that you feel about the media...besides...the advertising about the credit card? I mean like..., for example, if you watch...TV programs or newscast, do you have any—how do you feel about all these together?
> R. OK. If I see skinny model, you know, like drinking beer or, you know, eating chocolate bar, you know, that's kind of aggravating. I feel...um..., you know, upset. Or...if I'm dieting, I'd think, "How can they eat candy bar and still be thin?" So,...you know....

I. OK. Are you talking about what you see on the advertising or...on the program?
R. I think actually probably both. I mean...because there's plenty of....
I. OK. When you talk about the media, what do you think about? I mean what do you understand what it means by "the media?"
R. The media would be...um...movies that I watch and TV and commercials and,...you know.
I. OK. Um...when you see those skinny women...drinking beer or eating chocolate,...um...anything else that you feel besides...being angry or aggravated? I mean do you feel anything else besides that?
R. Um...I guess...sometimes I feel really bad. Um...it's kind of.... Um...the message to me is that--I mean this can be difficult.... The only thin women are allowed to feel sexy, and only...um...um.... Like if you are fat person, then you shouldn't have sexual impulses, and you shouldn't feel sexual, and you shouldn't expect the man to be interested in you.

Of the six informants in these two groups, Jane provided an analytical discussion that best illustrates how a person associates the meanings of mass media and advertising portrayals into the meanings of one's life. As noted earlier in this chapter, Jane grew up in the family that held a belief that women are not as worthy as men. She felt she was never loved nor approved of by her father. She is obsessed with buying the dolls and figurines she never received from her parents. Her lifestyle as well as some of the decisions she has made about her life seems to be guided by what she perceives being promoted in the media as a worthwhile thing to do. For example, she used to think she had to be married to someone when she was younger, partly because it was portrayed in the media as the acceptable way of life.

I. OK. What do you feel about...do you think that the mass media have any influence on your life?
R. Yes.
I. OK. How so?
R. Because the mass media show that if you are the perfect woman, you got married. So, they show all these women getting married.
I. OK. What make a woman perfect woman?
R. Finding the right husband. He makes good money. You have a good life. And, your value...how good you are depends on the husband you have.
I. Is that how the media have influence on you thought?
R. Yes.
I. It still do that now?
R. No.
I. How come? I mean what change that?

R. Because women now.... The media make women realize now, modern women, realize that they can be self-sufficient, they can make it on their own. They don't have to have the perfect husband to...be someone. The media have changed.

I. How so?

R. OK. The media have changed. When I grew up, the media showed women were not good unless they were married and had children. And then, they had to be perfect children. They had to go to college. They had to eat perfect foods. You have to be the perfect mother and be home and not work. Now the media show these self-sufficient women, and most women now...are working mothers. So, they change the shows. They have the cooking for working mothers, faster foods, how to make them quicker, how to dress for work, how to be successful in their workforce. When I grew up, it didn't show how to be successful in the workforce because your husband will do that, and you didn't have to be in the workforce.

I. OK. Anything else that you think the mass media can affect your life?

R. Um...I still think that I have to...um...decorate like Martha Stewart. I think I have to cook European foods now. Now I'm trying to learn French foods, and...and I'm feeling like I'm missing something if I...don't follow the news, you know. You feel like you have to be perfect women.

Although the present study fails to produce a comprehensive account of how exactly mass media and advertising may have influenced every informant on a long-term basis, the foregoing discussion suggests that the influence of mass media can never be ruled out. Furthermore, it is the contention of some informants who seem to have been well on their way to recovery from compulsive buying that it is important for a person to be careful of not letting mass media or anything else define his or her own needs. These informants are Pam, Rita, Meg, Barbara, and Pat. These are their statements they made.

Pam:

The companies get more power this way, you know, clothing companies, you know, whatever...any type of companies. They gain power as long as they keep people in debt. I don't like that. I don't believe in that anymore. I prefer to be myself and to be happy with the amount of money I make and spend it the way I want to spend it, and I think the mass media force them, to some degree, to spend it the way they want it spent. ...Years ago I would dress up for job, dress up for people. Today I don't do that much anymore. Then I would think that I need to be more dressed—makeup, earrings and everything. Today I don't have to do that. I know of who I am more than I did before, but I am learning everyday who I am

Rita:

I. Do you think that because the advertising and the media that they portray these things (what make a person happy) you told me, do you think that those things have any influence on your life at all?
R. Um...I think...it used to, but I think now I'm very aware of it, and I watch, and I don't...um...I don't believe it like I used to.

Meg:

I am learning to take what I want. I...uh...you know...I realize too that a lot of the...you know...like on Home and Garden TV and the craft, the people that are showing you how to do the craft are the ones that work for the company that produce craft items. So...uh...it's again a marketing.

Barbara:

People don't realize they don't think for themselves. You know, they just...all these processed food and all these junks, and they buy stuffs and buy and buy. These crazy consumers, they think they just want. You know, they don't even know that they are being...marketed. They don't even know it. People do not know their need. They know their want, but they do not know their need, and I need...I need very very little to get on by now.

Pat:

I'm trying to be real clear about my own individual value system is, and then use the mass media to compliment that value system, not to be a substitute for it, and...I think that's the process.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Drawing from the findings presented in Chapter 4, this chapter presents the discussions of the major findings, the implications, and recommendations for research on compulsive buying, mass media effects, and consumer socialization. The chapter concludes with the recommendations for practical programs to deal with compulsive buying problems.

Discussion of the Major Findings

Comorbidity and Family History of Compulsive Buying

The findings in this study confirm the notion mentioned in Chapter 2 that there are meanings behind an individual's compulsive buying behavior. This conclusion does not reject the validity of the biological explanation in the psychiatric domain of compulsive buying literature (e.g. Lejoyeux, 1996). Indeed, all informants confirmed that they tend to be impulsive and compulsive in other areas, such as eating, drinking, maintaining interpersonal relationships with their loved ones, and thinking around certain topics. This finding is consistent with a previous study suggesting that compulsive buyers tend to be compulsive in general (Christenson et al., 1994). All informants are well aware of their compulsive tendency, and this awareness has inhibited most of them from experimenting with what they see as more problematic behaviors such as drinking, gambling, and using illegal drugs. The validity of a biological explanation for these informants' compulsive tendency seems to be supported by their accounts of their family members having problems with alcohol or drug addictions, compulsive buying, and depression. In short, the comorbidity and the family history aspects of the findings are consistent with what has been reported in the compulsive buying literature (e.g. Black 1996). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that only one of the twelve women interviewed has a parent whose control over buying was questionable. The rest of the informants grew up with parents who were quite or even extremely prudent with money. Given these

findings, it is plausible to conclude that while an individual's compulsive tendency may be inherited, her exhibition of this compulsion in buying may not.

Buying Behavior

The two most interesting findings about the compulsive buying behavior are in the areas of shopping motivations and the merchandise categories shopped for during the compulsive buying episodes. The findings in these two areas do not necessarily differ from what has been reported in the compulsive buying literature. They, however, expand our perception of the psychological and behavioral profiles of a typical compulsive buyer.

Reading through previous studies on compulsive buying will leave one with the impression that compulsive buyers are people who try to remedy their low self-esteem by excessively buying for themselves non-utilitarian products, such as clothes and accessories as well as high-tech and decorative products. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, Christenson et al. (1994) reported that compulsive buyers frequently buy clothes, shoes, and jewelry. An earlier study conducted by O'Guinn and Faber (1989) has similar findings, and the researchers noted that compulsive buyers buy these products because they give them "social benefits." Faber (1992) suggested that compulsive buyers buy these products as a means to gain recognition from others.

In this study, most of the women interviewed generally bought clothes and accessories. Interestingly, however, appearance-enhancement was not the only type of products they tend to buy during the compulsive buying episodes. Other non-utilitarian, but not necessarily socially visible, products were mentioned by these women. These are figurines, teddy bears, holiday decoration products, craft kits, books, utensils, and stationery. Three women said they compulsively buy toys and clothes for their children. The seemingly utilitarian products such as foods and household products were also mentioned by two women as the kind of things they tend to buy. Given the diversity of the types of products mentioned by these women, the conclusion that the compulsive buyers buy exclusively as a means to be socially visible is in question.

The other interesting finding about the buying behavior is in the area of buying motivation. There are no studies that specifically deal with the motivations behind

compulsive buying. Much research has focused on describing the psychological makeup as well as the buying behavior of compulsive buyers. Nevertheless, the findings from previous studies have suggested that the underlying motivation behind most purchases made by compulsive buyers seems not to be a desire to own or to use the products purchased. Two research teams, for example, reported that it was common for the compulsive buyers not to use the merchandise they purchased (Christenson et al. 1994; Faber et al. 1987). In a conceptual paper, Faber (1992) suggested four possible motivations behind compulsive buying. These are a need for recognition from others, a need for attention from sales personnel, a need for acting out an anger against significant others, and a need to escape into the fantasy world. With these various motivations, Faber seemed to imply that compulsive buyers' motivations essentially stem from their need to conceal how they truly feel about themselves. The products bought are an instant means for a person to gain recognition from others. The idea of compulsive buyers being motivated by a need for social recognition seems to be held by other researchers as well. d'Astous and Bellemare (1989), for example, noted that compulsive buyers are primarily motivated by a desire to improve their social image.

Some informants interviewed for the present study seemed to be motivated by a desire to gain recognition from others. The informants with a motivation for social recognition were especially pronounced among those categorized as the Striver. The informants in the Abused and the Neglected categories did not appear to be motivated to improve their social image. Shopping and buying for the Abused and the Neglected was more of an emotional escape. Four distinctive motivations were found among the informants interviewed. These are to shield loved ones from experiencing material scarcity, to feel like they belong in an aspired social circle, to escape from the painful memories of life experiences, and to feel nurtured either through the shopping experience itself or from collecting meaningful objects. The second motivation on the list—a desire to belong to an aspired social circle—seems to be the only motivation that fits most to what has been reported and discussed in the previous research on compulsive buying (d'Astous & Bellemare 1989; Faber 1992). All these buying motivations will be better understood when they are considered in light of the informants' upbringings. How

informants' upbringings are linked to these buying motivations will be discussed in the next section.

Family Backgrounds and Compulsive Buying Behavior

Guided by the analytical framework of Symbolic Interactionism, communications are considered as the foundation from which the informants' perceptions of self are formed. The kind of interpersonal communication that is of focus in this section is the one that occurs in the informants' upbringing environments. Research on compulsive buying has yielded very little empirical findings about the role of upbringing on the development of compulsive buying. The one study that addresses this relationship was conducted by Faber and O'Guinn (1988). The researchers found the following factors to be significantly present among the compulsive buyer samples: being treated differently from siblings, trying to live up to parents' expectation, and being frequently rewarded with money or gifts for good behavior. Some informants interviewed for the present study mentioned similar upbringing experiences reported by Faber and O'Guinn. Tina, for example, felt that her mother gave her sister more attention. Tina, Jane, and Brenda felt compelled to live up to their parents' expectations. Dee was the only informant who was always rewarded with money and toys for doing whatever her mother asked her to do. The rest of the informants, however, described the kinds of upbringing experience that were different from what Faber and O'Guinn had reported.

For the twelve informants in this study, four distinctive patterns of upbringing experience were identified. Each type of upbringing experience yields a certain pattern in which the informants see themselves. Furthermore, different kinds of what seem to be the informants' motivation to buy were also found to vary accordingly to the patterns of upbringing and of self-perception. The association between upbringing, self-perception, and buying motivation was used as a basis for the categorization of the informants into four types of compulsive buyers. The four types of compulsive buyers are the Provider, the Striver, the Abused, and the Neglected. The brief description of each type of compulsive buying is presented as follows.

The Providers

While the Providers tend to make impressive progress in the workforce, their sense of self is defined by the fear of economic insecurity. This fear stems from the experience of economic deficiency in their upbringing. They learn to be responsible for themselves and their loved one at a very young age. Their self-worth is based on their ability to fulfill their loved ones' material needs and desires. Their aspiration is to shield their loved ones (especially their children) from any material shortfall they themselves may have experienced growing up. What they tend to buy during the compulsive episodes are groceries and household items. While the Providers rarely buy anything for themselves; they set a lenient limit when it comes to buying things (generally toys and clothes) for their children.

The Strivers

The Strivers' sense of self is marked by their insecurity resulting from comparing themselves against certain images of how a person should be or what they should have in order to live a happy and successful life. These aspired images are composed through their interaction with their peers and/or family members. The themes of comparisons are generally centered on socio-economic status, physical appearance, and/or certain skills. The Strivers buy for themselves the things (generally, but not always, clothes and home-decoration items) they believe bring them closer to the image they aspired to be. As for the upbringing, although the four "Striver" compulsive buyers in this study came from working-class backgrounds, they did not seem to have to struggle economically as the "Provider" informants did. However, they were exposed to the social encounters where they were made to feel inadequate about what they had or did not have.

The Abused

The Abused compulsive buyers' sense of self is stigmatized and suppressed by the abuses (i.e. sexually and psychologically for this study) they experience in their upbringing. The sexual and psychological abuses they experienced while they were growing up render them doubtful about their self-worth. Their doubt about their self-worth is essentially the meaning behind their psychological characteristic of having low self-esteem. The most distinctive characteristic of the Abused is that they tend to fail to

recognize either what they truly wanted for themselves or what action should be taken in a timely manner for their best interest. Much of their compulsive buying was motivated by a desire to suppress the emerging memories of the painful experiences at the earlier time in their lives.

The Neglected

The Neglected's insecurity stems primarily from one or both of two reasons. First, the Neglected may be neglected by parents who can provide their children with material needs, but who are not capable of providing their children with emotional nourishment. Second, the Neglected may be treated differently from their siblings. The negligence as well as the perception of unfairness leaves the Neglected with a sense of hopelessness. The Neglected generally feel hopelessness about gaining parents' attention. For the Neglected, low self-esteem means a perception of oneself as being worthless and incapable of being loved or accepted. Besides being motivated by a desire to escape, the informants in the Neglected category tend to shop with an intention to build one or more collections of their favorite products.

General Conclusions about Upbringing Patterns

The foregoing discussion of the four upbringing patterns associated with the four types of compulsive buyers reveals that being treated differently from siblings or being rewarded with material things for good behavior is not the only kind of socialization that is the root cause of compulsive buying behavior. The various upbringing factors such as being deprived of material things while growing up, feeling compelled to be competitive, seeing oneself as inferior to or different from other people, being neglected by parents, experiencing minimal parents' expression of affection, being burdened with family problems, and being either traumatized or stigmatized with domestic abuses were found in this study as the roots of these informants' sense of lacking. It is premature, given the limited number of informants interviewed for this study, to conclude that these are the exhaustive list of motivations for compulsive buying. It is safe, however, to assume that how each informant sees herself, as well as how she shops, is shaped by the early experiences in her family.

One needs to be cautious about using the upbringing backgrounds found in this study as the sole predictor of compulsive buying behavior. For one, the findings are based on only a small number of compulsive buyers. It would be more useful to use the finding about these various upbringing patterns as an indication that there are many, and perhaps more, factors contributing to low self-esteem. The other commonality among all informants in this study is that they grew up receiving minimal or no guidance of how to go about developing a proper value system or what it means to be functional in the marketplace domain. As extensively discussed in Chapter 4, the parents of these informants were burdened with many financial, emotional, and/ or behavioral problems of their own. In short, low self-esteem and a lack of guidance from parents are the common themes in these informants' early experiences, regardless of whether they are the Provider, the Striver, the Abused, or the Neglected. The low self-esteem, according to several studies on compulsive buying (e.g. Faber et al. 1987; Hanley & Wilhelm 1992; O'Guinn & Faber 1989), emerges as a universal trait among compulsive buyers.

In conclusion, the findings in this study suggest that these informants, given their different family backgrounds, have low self-esteem. Buying, either done on a continual or episodic basis, may be used as a convenient means to temporarily resolve their negative self-perceptions. Some informants (especially those in the Striver category) may do so with a belief that improving their social image will lead to improved self-perception. Others, however, do so because they simply want to escape from the emotional repercussions of negative self-perception. There were a number of emotional setbacks these informants reported experiencing when they were compelled to go shopping. The common emotional setbacks mentioned were boredom, loneliness, stress, and anxiety over professional as well as personal performance, stress over financial security, fear of being abandoned by spouses, memories of traumatic experiences, and remorseful feelings resulting from self-realization of what one truly is or has become. This emotional aspect of the findings is consistent with the research on compulsive behaviors in general. It has been reported that boredom, anxiety, and stress are the common onsets of compulsive behaviors (Miller 1980; Zuckerman 1979).

Faber (1992), following the trend in research on addictive behaviors, notes that compulsive buying is a combination of biological, psychological, and sociological factors. Based on Faber's conceptual framework, the discussion in this chapter so far has addressed only the psychological factors of the informants' compulsive buying. Two crucial questions pertaining to the sociological factors have yet to be addressed. The first question is why these informants chose to deal with, or escape from, their problems using compulsive buying. It has been noted earlier in this chapter that there are a number of motivations behind these informants' buying behavior. The Provider wants to shield her loved ones from experiencing the material scarcity she has endured. The Striver wants to belong to an aspired social class. The Abused wants to avoid dealing with painful memories of the abuses and stigma resulting from the abuse. The Neglected wants to nurture herself with the objects she loves. Behind these various motivations appears to be much significance placed by these informants on the material objects, or the mere act of acquiring them. To further explain, whether these informants frequently buy for themselves or for others, and whether they engage in compulsive buying on a regular or on an episodic basis, they all seem to assume that having more things is a prerequisite to a person's feeling better or being happier.

Because all women interviewed for this study are compulsive buyers, it is impossible to assess whether they are indeed more "materialistic" than general consumers. Previous research on the materialistic trait of compulsive buyers is rare and the findings have been conflicting. O'Guinn and Faber (1989), using Belk's (1985) materialism measurement, found that their compulsive-buyer samples were significantly more materialistic than their general samples (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). However, the researchers noted that the compulsive buyers were not necessarily more "materialistic" because they had a greater desire to actually own things. Compulsive buyers' significantly higher scores on materialism were due to their higher scores on "envy" and "nongenerosity" survey questions. They suggested that compulsive buyers' materialistic trait is more of an interpersonal issue than an actual desire to own things. A follow-up study using younger samples found that compulsive buying tendency among adolescences was positively related to their level of generosity (d'Astous et al., 1990).

The researchers, nevertheless, noted that the high level of generosity among the adolescents with a tendency to buy compulsively could be explained by their motivation to improve their social image through sharing material things.

Given the inconclusive findings of the compulsive buyers' materialistic trait and the present study's lack of comparative data between the informants and the general consumers, it is premature to conclude that compulsive buyers are more materialistic than general consumers. What is revealed from these informants' accounts is the significance they tend to place on material things in an individual's pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. This notion leads to the other crucial question, which is this: from what sources do these informants learn about the meaning and/or the significance of material things? This question, of course, addresses the issue of socialization. When it comes to socialization, Faber and O'Guinn (1988) listed these sources as the most important: family, peers, school, workplace, church, and the mass media.

The foregoing discussion of the findings about the informants' family backgrounds reveals that virtually all of these informants received very little attention from their parents early in their lives. For most informants, family does not appear to instill directly the value of materialism. The only exception was Debra's mother. She was the only parent who explicitly preached to her daughter about the significance of wealth and success. For most informants, the acquisition of material values from their families is subtle and does not necessarily involve a desire to own things, and to be rich and/ or powerful as the concept of materialism would generally signify. This subtle learning involves observing some of their family members collecting things or having more pleasant moods after a shopping trip. Jane, for example, grew up observing her parents and relatives collecting various things. Brenda, Barbara, and Tina observed their parents shopping excessively for personal products. Dorothy and Pat noticed that their mothers, who were the victims of their husbands' psychological abuse, had more pleasant moods after spending time shopping. It must be noted that while these family members may enjoy shopping or collecting, most did not seem to lose control over their behavior, as a typical compulsive buyer would generally do. Thus, while family members did play a role in showing the recreational benefits of material acquisition, their role in passing on

the materialism values to the informants seems limited. However, while most informants' families did not directly pass on the materialism ideology to the informants, the families play a minimal role at best in preparing these informants to be financially responsible. This is due to the fact that these families were ridden with a myriad of psychological and financial problems.

Peer Socialization and Compulsive Buying

Aside from the family, the other socialization source is peer groups. Due to a need to limit the scope of the study so that the issues that are of priority can be pursued in depth, the peer source of socialization is not the focus of this study. As a result, the information pertaining to these informants' socialization with their peers is limited. Thus, the discussion to be presented here is based on the informants' responses to a probe about whether they had a lot of friends while they were growing up or their casual comments at their own initiation about their friends. An overall impression derived from these responses and comments is that most informants grew up isolated. The only informant who seemed to have many lasting friendships is Brenda. Some informants, including Debra, Jan, Mary, and Pat were not necessarily isolated; however, their relationships with peers were not close. Their friendships were limited to casual conversations or as shopping companions on the weekends. The rest of the informants were generally isolated due to one or more of these reasons: being ashamed of their family problems or socio-economic backgrounds, having busy schedules, and being too burdened by emotional problems to be capable of maintaining a meaningful relationship with someone. Given the limited information, any further discussion about peer socialization would be unfounded beyond the indication of a tendency for isolation or, at least, a lack of emotional connection between themselves and peer groups.

Addressed in the previous section is this question: From which sources have the informants learned the meaning and/or the significance of material things? The discussion in the previous section as well as in this section has focused on the family and peers as the plausible sources from which these informants learn about the significance of material things. As noted, the overall impression is that for most informants, family and peers play a minimal role in directly disseminating the materialism values to these

informants. Most informants, due to their personal problems and family backgrounds, grew up without many emotional ties to their families or peers. Furthermore, they also experienced material deprivation earlier in their lives. Given these factors, the outcomes of family and peers as the sources of consumer socialization for these informants are low self-esteem, a lack of clarity in personal value system, and a lack of emotional ties in interpersonal relationships.

Mass-Mediated Communications and Compulsive Buying

As Faber and O'Guinn (1988) noted, mass media have become one of the main sources of consumer socialization in the modern society. At the core of the conception of mass media as the source of socialization is the question of whether and, if so, in what ways mass media influence people. Given the link between these two concepts, the informants' discussions of their experiences with mass-mediated communications were analyzed in light of the short-term as well as the long-term effects. Before proceeding to discuss the long-term and the short-term influences of mass-mediated communications on these informants, the following notation needs to be made about these informants' meanings of mass media and advertising, their general attitudes toward mass media and advertising institutions, and the extent and nature of their mass media and advertising exposures. For these informants, advertising and mass media are not different in their roles as the promotional agents for the American corporations in particular and materialism in general. If anything, advertising was perceived as more straightforward than the mass media in its intention. Advertising, as two informants (i.e. Mary and Jan) indicated, provides straightforward product information while mass media tend to shape people's thinking. Secondly, due to their busy schedules and/ or their attempts to avoid being around their unloving parents, most informants were not heavy users of television while they were growing up. They generally avoided TV commercials but selectively used certain mass media and advertising channels for information about products and style trends. Magazines were used by about half of these informants as a means to keeping up with fashion trends.

Although the informants' general attitudes toward the mass media and advertising have become that of mistrust, there are indications that they are or have been vulnerable

to being influenced by mass media and advertising. These indications suggest both the short-term influences on their buying decisions and the long-term influences on their worldviews. The short-term influences were reflected in the informants' accounts of how they were triggered by specific stimuli seen or heard in the editorial as well as the advertising domains of the mass-mediated communications. The outcomes of these short-term influences range from making impulse purchases to being obsessed with thoughts about shopping. These thoughts included having desires for specific products, thinking around certain style and/ or color trends, engaging in information search for certain products, fantasizing about how certain products will enhance living and/ or personal images, and fantasizing about how sales promotions will help one save money. These thought patterns do not always lead to the actual purchase of merchandise. These thoughts, however, were pursued in an obsessive manner, and one of the obvious outcomes is usually the waste of time living in the fantasy world. This finding seemed consistent with O'Guinn and Faber's report (1989) that compulsive buyers had a higher score than general consumers on a scale measuring a propensity to fantasize. Besides being triggered by the mass-mediated stimuli to obsessively think or fantasize about shopping, these informants were also vulnerable to making impulse purchases as a result of hearing or seeing sales-promotion messages touting reduced prices and limited-time offers.

The psychological makeup pertaining to the impulse control disorder as well as the obsessive-compulsive disorder is apparent in the informants' obsessive thoughts about shopping as well as in their tendency to make impulse purchases after exposure to some infomercials. The clearest indication that these thoughts were obsessive is the fact that most informants, in spite of having spent years in the recovery program of Debtor Anonymous, were still concerned about their vulnerability to the obsessive thought patterns. They indicated that they have to be mindful in exposing themselves, or their children, to what is presented in the media and advertising. Furthermore, a few informants (e.g. Tina and Jane) who were in the infancy of their recovery progress resolved to avoid exposing themselves to the mass media channels in which the promotional messages they felt vulnerable to were delivered. For these informants, a

shopping trip did not always immediately follow the exposure to the advertising messages. They, however, were engaged in the thoughts about shopping, and such thoughts were almost always temporarily eliminated by the actual shopping trips.

All but one of these informants was not heavy users of mass media nor heavily exposed to advertising at the earlier time of their lives. Respondents' exposure to mass media and advertising appeared to be selective to fit their information and entertainment needs. The extent and the nature of these informants' mass media and advertising exposure leave one with the impression that they were more or less in the average realm when it comes to their interactions with these sources of consumer socialization. The "average" nature and extent of these informants' mass media and advertising exposures, along with the following three findings, could easily leave one with the impression that these informants may not have been at all influenced by mass-mediated socialization sources.

One of these findings was that these informants were very cognizant of the profit-driven motivations of the mass media organizations and the surrealistic nature of the mass-mediated presentations. By mainly presenting the lifestyles of the people in the affluent segment of the population, and by frequently omitting the undesired and/ or unintended consequences of problematic behaviors (e.g. drug use, premature sexual relations, and credit-card abuses), the mass media-sources, along with their portrayals of life-styles were perceived with skepticism among these informants. Secondly, while all informants were able to readily provide accounts of how they were vulnerable to specific mass-mediated stimuli, most of them were not able to be specific in their discussion of how mass-mediated sources might have influenced them beyond a desire for specific products. Most informants said, in effect, that they might have been influenced by mass media and advertising, but they just did not know how it happened. One informant, Pam, even went so far as to say at the beginning of the interview that she was certain that she was not influenced by the media. Finally, the informants seemed to see the interpersonal sources (e.g. peers, neighbors, and people they had come across in their lives) as influential, both in providing inspirations to shop for certain products or a certain style and in reinforcing the materialism values. These three findings initially lead to the notion

that while specific mass media and advertising stimuli may trigger the informants' compulsive and impulsive tendencies, mass media and advertising play a minimal role in the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers.

In spite of the indications of the minimal influence of mass media and advertising as the consumer socialization sources, there were two major clues suggesting that mass media and advertising may influence these informants in a profound way. The first clue came from the informants' acknowledgement of the possibility that they themselves might have been influenced by mass media and advertising. As noted, most informants could not pinpoint the exact nature of how mass media and advertising might have influenced them. Rita was the only informant who could readily provide an analytical account of how mass media and advertising influenced her, especially prior to her commitment to the recovery process. She indicated that the fact that the majority of people portrayed in the mass media and advertising were physically attractive, affluent, and/ or powerful left her with the impression that that was what the real world is or should be. Because her life-style was so different from the one portrayed in the mass media and advertising, she felt as if she was not a part of the mainstream of the society. For the other informants, the discussions of the long-term effects of mass media and advertising on themselves were brief and generally limited to the acknowledgement of the possibility.

It would be wrong, however, to use the informants' inability to discuss the exact nature of how mass media and advertising influenced them as the basis for the limited-effect conclusion. For one, their inability to readily discuss the topic might stem from the fact that they might not have given the issue an in-depth consideration. The other plausible explanation for the informants' inability to discuss the topic could be related to the nature of socialization through mass media sources itself. In their discussion of the various sources of consumer socialization, Faber and O' Guinn (1988) wrote, "The mass media are unique agents of consumer socialization not only because of their pervasive nature, but also because of the type of consumer learning that they provide. Socialization via the mass media is often shallow and incomplete. The media can impart strong visual images and memorable phrases and slogans, but rarely the understanding of why they are

important" (p. 58). Given the evanescent and elusive nature of socialization through mass media (and advertising), it is understandable that most informants were not able to retrieve specific details about the exact nature of the influence.

The other clue that suggests the possibility of the long-term influence of mass media and advertising on these informants comes from the informants' concern for others, especially children, to be affected by the mass media and advertising portrayals. Aside from the violence, premature sexual relations, drug abuse, and unrealistic portrayals of the female body, incessant desire for material things was central to these informants' concern for mass media and advertising's influence on other people. In fact, few informants (e. g. Pam and Meg) were so concerned for their children that they took action to protect them by limiting their television viewing time. It is noteworthy that the kind of portrayals that were of concern among these informants is not limited to short-term vulnerability to specific stimuli. Given these informants' concern for other people being influenced by mass media and advertising --on the issues that pertain to the long-term effects-- it is plausible that their concern was a reflection of their own experiences of being influenced.

This notion, of course, is not substantially supported by the findings in this study. However, the central assumption and some empirical findings in the area of third-person effects research seem to support the notion. Davison (1983), who was the pioneer in the third-person effects research, hypothesized that people tend to see mass media messages as having greater influence on others than on themselves. The empirical findings in 13 out of 14 studies conducted between 1983 and 1992 have suggested the validity of Davison's argument (Perloff, 1993). In a recent paper, Lo and Wei (2000), reviewing a number of later studies of third-person effects on such mass media messages as rap music, pornography, and television violence, noted that the third-person effects are stronger when the message is perceived as socially less desirable or potentially harmful. In essence, the nature of the influences investigated in the present study is about a person's being more or less "brainwashed" by mass media and advertising with materialism ideology. One of the ultimate outcomes of such influence is a lack of self-control in the accumulation of material things--something not very socially desirable.

Based on the assumption and the findings in the third-person effects literature, the informants' concern for others being influenced by mass media and advertising could be an indication of themselves being influenced.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych reported the first systematic study of compulsive buying in 1987. In their seminal study, the three researchers used a combination of qualitative approaches, including participant observation, in-depth interview, and semi-structured questionnaire. Their findings were revealing, especially in the areas of compulsive buying behavior. What they found has been used to guide the many follow-up studies. Virtually every follow-up study was conducted using the survey in which the samples of compulsive buyers were compared against the samples of "normal" consumers. The central thrust of these studies seems to be an attempt to find either how compulsive buyers are different from general consumer or how extensive the problem of compulsive buying is. The survey approach is definitely an appropriate tool for these types of research questions. The problem with the compulsive buying research is that there is still only a limited number of reports on the root causes of the problem. Thus far, only two papers (i.e. Faber and O'Guinn, 1988 and Faber, 1992) have addressed the causes of compulsive buying.

Given the limited information we have about the causes of compulsive buying, there is a pressing need to extend the investigation beyond the descriptions and the extent of compulsive buying. The consequences of compulsive buying, as the findings in the previous studies as well as in this study have revealed, go beyond financial problems. This problematic behavior has, at the least, profound effects on individuals' psychological health as well as on interpersonal relationships. Being aware of the extent and the description of the compulsive buying is important, but to successfully cure it requires some knowledge of its root causes. This dissertation is designed to address this need in the compulsive buying research. However, given the limited scale of the present study and the pressing need for knowledge of the causes of the problems, more studies on the casual causes of compulsive buying are recommended.

There is another problem besides the limitation of the casual investigation in compulsive buying research. This problem lies in what appears to be the common assumption among the researchers on compulsive buying. In their seminal paper, Faber, O'Guinn, and Krych (1987) wrote,

> While both men and women suffer from compulsive spending, it tends to manifest itself differently among them. Women tend to spend more on clothes and jewelry while men seem to spend more on cars and electronics. However, it may be that these different products actually serve the same goal—to bolster self-esteem. For women, a large part of their self-esteem has been socially conditioned to be derived from how they look. Clothes and jewels may help them feel more attractive or successful. Men, on the other hand, are traditionally rewarded for possessing expertise and/ or wealth. Being an innovator in new electronic gadgets (VCRs, PCs, stereos, etc.) may give some men a feeling of being knowledgeable, and therefore important, while cars serve as a symbol of wealth, status and power. In each case, however, what the compulsive spender may really be trying to buy is an enhanced self perception. (p. 134)

As noted, their finding about the types of merchandise, among other things, in this seminal study was based on their use of qualitative approaches. Given the fact that compulsive buyers typically have low self-esteem, these authors' attribution of the motivations behind their female participants' tendency to buy beauty-related products and male participants' tendency to buy technology-related products to their attempts to enhance self-perception is logical. However, the problem in compulsive buying research exists because the researchers conducting the follow-up studies seem to hold a similar assumption that compulsive buyers are mainly motivated by a desire to boost their self-esteem, which may be caused by biological and psychological factors, through buying image-enhancement products. It is noteworthy that virtually all of these studies were conducted using structured survey.

The methodological implication of this problem is that the compulsive buyers who were studied had no room to express, in their own terms, their motivation, or at least what they believed to be their own motivations. As the findings in this study would suggest, a desire to improve self-image is one of the many motivations behind the compulsive buying behavior. What the compulsive buyers buy, during the compulsive buying episodes, may not always be image-enhancement products. For example, a

person can compulsively buy groceries. Furthermore, because it was found in the present study that there is a plausible link between certain types of buying motivation and the upbringing environment, a failure to let the compulsive buyers studied express their own experience in their own terms may hinder our understanding of the causes of compulsive buying. Given the pressing needs for information about the causes of compulsive buying, and the limitation of the structured research design, it is important for a researcher to guard his or her preconceived notion and to begin hearing what those studied have to say. The most appropriate method that allows the people who are studied to talk freely about their own experience is, of course, the in-depth interview.

Besides the general recommendation for investigating the causes of compulsive buying, preferably via the open-ended methodology so that the casual explanations of compulsive buying can be revealed by those who experience the problem, two major areas of investigation are recommended. The first area of research recommended here involves more elaboration in the study of the types of compulsive buyers. Four types of compulsive buyers were identified among the 12 informants in this study. Given the limited number of informants, more studies should be designed to find out whether there is any other type of compulsive buyer that can be identified as distinctively different from these four types. Moreover, more studies should be conducted to find out about the prevalence of each type of compulsive buyers in the population.

The other area of investigation recommended here involves the compulsive buyers' susceptibility to mass-mediated stimuli. It was found in this study that most informants were generally vulnerable to sales-promotion messages as well as limited-time-offer advertising messages. This vulnerability, which seems to contribute to the informants' impulsive and compulsive tendency, deserves a systematic investigation as to whether it is unique to compulsive buyers. Moreover, there were some indications that the informants in different categories of compulsive buyers were susceptible to different appeals in mass-mediated communication. The "Striver" informants, for example, tended to response to the promotional messages that appeal to status images and worldly achievement, while the "Provider" informants resolved to provide for their loved ones the material things portrayed in the media. Given the sketchy findings in this respect of the

present study, there is a need for research specifically designed to address the variation of the susceptibility to advertising appeals among different types of compulsive buyers.

Implications for the Treatments of Compulsive Buying

As noted in Chapter 2, there have been a number of research teams investigating the problem of compulsive buying. One type of these research teams comprises primarily of social science researchers, especially those investigating consumer behavior. Ronald J. Faber and Thomas O'Guinn best represent the social science researchers investigating on the topic. The other type of research teams comprises primarily of psychiatrists. The teams led by Michel Lejoyeux and by Susan L. McElroy exemplify the research teams from the psychiatric branches. While the social science researchers' goal has been limited to the understanding of compulsive buying, the psychiatrists' goal has extended to finding a treatment for compulsive buying. Having found that compulsive buyers generally suffer from impulse-control disorder and/ or obsessive-compulsive disorder, two teams of psychiatrists investigating the problem advocated the use of antidepressant drugs (primarily fluoxetine) as a means to treat compulsive buying (Black et al. 1997McElroy et al. 1991). In McElroy et al.'s report (1991), three patients were treated with antidepressants; in Black et al.'s study (1997), ten subjects were administered fluvoxamine for a period of nine weeks. Their reports indicated that they used antidepressants with their patients and found that their patients were less occupied with shopping and spent less time and money shopping.

Based on the reports from these psychiatrists, there is no doubt that medication can be a viable treatment for compulsive buying, especially if the person also experiences depression. The present study does not focus on the treatment of compulsive buying. However, the informants' accounts of their recovery have caused some doubt about the long-term effectiveness of using medication for the treatments of compulsive buying. To further explain, about half of the informants (i.e. Pam, Dorothy, Mary, Meg, Brenda, Tina, and Barbara) indicated that they had experienced, at least once, a period of severe depression. They were treated with medication for it. Again, because the focus of the study was not on the treatment of compulsive buying, the exact medication they were

treated with was not questioned in detail. Because they experienced depression, the most likely medication they were treated with was antidepressants. These informants continue to be treated with medication, at least up until around the time of the interviews. However, even after their treatment for depression, these informants continued to shop compulsively. This is not to mention that they continued to take medicine thereafter. Indeed, it was not uncommon for these informants to indicate that they were introduced to Debtor Anonymous through their associations with other Twelve-Step programs, such as Ala-Non, Codependence Anonymous (CODA), and Overeater Anonymous (OA).

Pam, for example, was treated with severe depression associated with her preoccupation with being abandoned by her husband. She shopped compulsively at the time she experienced the severe depression, and she continued to do so afterward. During this time, she took medication. It took her seven more years after she was initially treated for depression to realize that she had problem controlling her spending. It has been only in the last three years that Pam has been in the recovery program for compulsive buying, and it has only been in the last three years that she did not have a compulsion to shop as she used to. Given Pam's account, while it is plausible that the medication she continued to be administered may have helped dealing with the psychological characteristics she has, it appears that her diminishing desire to shop could be explained by her commitment to the recovery program for compulsive buying.

The other noteworthy finding about these informants' recovery process is this: the length of their DA membership is not always an indication of how far they are in recovery progress. Debra, Mary, and Pat had been a DA member for about eight years. Pam for about three years, and Rita and Barbara had been in DA for about a year and a half. The impression that is derived from their discussions about how they shopped up until the time of the interviews was that Debra, Mary, and Pat were still very much involved in compulsive buying. They, of course, did not shop as much as they used to. However, financial limitations and the effort to adhere to the financial plans, rather than diminished desire to shop, seemed to contribute to the reduction of their compulsive buying. Rita, Barbara, and Pam, on the other hand, stopped their compulsive buying. They indicated that they did not have a desire to shop as they used to. One plausible

explanation for the difference in these two groups' abstinence from compulsive buying could very well be the difference in the level of commitment to their recovery process.

The other plausible explanation about the difference in the level of abstinence from compulsive buying between the group of Rita, Barbara, and Pam and the group of Debra, Mary, and Pat may lie in these informants' understanding of the meanings of their lives as well as of the role material things play in their lives. The informants with less progress in recovery seem to not change these meanings. It was apparent that Debra and Mary's goals in life had not been changed, even if they had been in DA for several years. They, in essence, still very much strive for status image and worldly achievement. Pat's resentment toward her parents' negligence about her feeling after learning about the adoption remained to be resolved. She saw shopping as a "self-nurturing experience." She continued to shop. If there is any change in her shopping, she planned to do it more efficiently. The most distinctive characteristic of the informants with more advancement in recovery progress is that they seemed to have come to appreciate themselves the way they are, and are not letting themselves be influenced by such external factors as social norms or opinions of other people.

In conclusion, while medication may be useful in providing short-term relief from obsessive thoughts about shopping, the findings about the informants' recovery experience suggest that the commitment as well as the change of one's meanings about life priority is essential for lo ng-term recovery from compulsive buying.

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APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

A STUDY ON CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION OF COMPULSIVE BUYERS

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research project. The purpose of the study is to understand the consumer socialization of compulsive buyers. The study involves an analysis of in-depth interviews with a total of 20 compulsive buyers. All participants are members of Debtor Anonymous.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

As a participant, you are to participate in a one-on-one interview session. You will be asked questions concerning your family background, life experiences, shopping habits, and how they develop. The interview will last approximately two hours. Your responses will be audio-recorded and word-by-word transcribed for data analysis. Your interview will be analyzed such that the final conclusions are the reflection of overall responses by all participants.

RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Because the interviews will be audio-recorded and the content of interviews might involve participants' dysfunctional behaviors, you are to be aware that your reputation can be at risk. However, the following protection measures will be taken to minimize the risk.

1. The tapes and the transcriptions of the interviews will be securely stored. They will be made available only to the investigator, and her faculty advisor.
2. The tape of the interview will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed.
3. The transcriptions of the interviews will be destroyed within one year after the final copy of the dissertation is approved by the investigator's dissertation committee.

BENEFIT OF THE STUDY

Currently, knowledge and understanding are limited regarding the existence of the problem of compulsive buying and how it develops. By participating in the study, you are contributing to a greater awareness of the problem and a better understanding of how the problem develops.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the investigator, her faculty advisor, and another auditor unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the investigator, Miss Saovanee Tesgim, at

Address: 423 Sandlick Rd.
Princeton, KY 42445
Tel: (270) 365-1313

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed

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CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PART 1/1: Personal Information

Age	
How old are you?	
Marital Status	
Are you married…single…?	
Occupation	
Are you working now?	Probes: IF YES • What is your occupation? • How do you feel about your job? IF NO, go to the next question. • So, what do you do?
Education	
Are you currently a student?	Probes: IF YES • Where do you go to school? • What do you study? • How far you are toward the degree? IF NO • Where did you go to school? • What did you study? • What is your highest degree?
Income	
I will not ask you for a specific number but I would like you to tell me generally about your income level.	
Parents' Occupation	
What do your parents do?	
Place of Birth	
Where is your birthplace?	
Residence Pattern	
Tell me about where you have been living, starting from your birthplace to the present.	

Household Environment	
How many people are there in your household?	Probes: IF LIVE ALONE • How do you feel about living by yourself? IF LIVE WITH OTHERES • Who do you live with now? • How do you feel about your household…family relationships?
Community Environment	
Tell me about your community.	Probes • What is the size of your community? • How do you feel about your community? •

Church Activities	
Tell me about your religion?	Probes • What is your religion? • Do you belong to any specific denomination? What is the denomination? • Do you participate in any religion activity? What are the activities? • How do you feel about your religion?
Self Perceptions	
How would you describe yourself?	Probes: • SELF-ESTEEM Do you generally respect yourself for what you do and who you are? Can you give me examples? • OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE TRAITS Do you generally think long and hard about something and cannot get your mind out of it? Can you give me examples? • IMPULSIVE TRAITS Do you generally plan ahead when you do things? Can you give me examples?
Do you think that other people see you the same way you see yourself?	Probes: IF YES • How do you know? IF NO • How so? What do you think how other people think of you? • Do you agree with the way other people see you?
Life Perspectives	
Have you ever asked yourself what would make you a happy person?	Probes: IF YES • What do you think would make you happy? • How do these ideas come about? (*Listen for the influences of parents, friends, media, advertising, etc., and then probe for each of the influences mentioned the interviewee.*) IF NO • What things in your life make you happy? • How so?

Did you think the same way at earlier times in your life?	Probes: IF YES • If there are differences, what did you think would make you happy then? • How did these ideas come about? (*Listen for the influences of parents, friends, media, advertising, etc., and then probe for each of the influences mentioned the interviewee.*) IF NO • What things in your life make you happy? • How so?
Daily Life Activities	
What things in your life are the most important to you?	
Tell me about your daily life?	Probes: • How do you spend your time?
What things in your life do you enjoy doing the least?	
What things in your life do you enjoy doing the most?	Probes: • How about shopping?

PART 1/2: Description of Compulsive Buying Behaviors

Shopping Habits	
Tell me about your shopping habits.	
Do you have a list before you go shopping?	Probes: IF YES • How do you decide what to put in your shopping list? • Do you stick with the list when you shop? IF NO • How do you plan what to shop for?
How often do you go shopping?	Probes: IF NOT OFTEN • Why shopping is troublesome for you when you rarely go shopping?
When you go shopping, how often do you end up buying something?	Probes: IF NOT OFTEN • Why shopping is troublesome for you when you rarely buy anything when you shop?
When you go shopping, whom do you generally buy things for?	
Merchandises	
What do you generally shop for?	
How do you decide what to shop for?	Probes: • ROLE MODELS Do you have any role model that you look up for the ideas of what to shop for? • FAMILY & FRIENDS Do you have any friends or family members that you look up for the ideas of what to shop

	for? • MASS MEDIA Do you look at something in the media for the ideas of what to shop for? • ADVERTISING Do you look at something in advertising…or…catalog…or ….for the ideas of what to shop for?
Are you particular about the brands?	Probes: IF YES • What kind of brands do you like? • What is so appealing to you about those brands? • Do you have any other criteria besides the brand for the things you buy? IF NO • Do you have any criteria for selecting the things you buy?
What do you generally do with the merchandises once you get them?	Probes: • Do you USE them? • Do you REFUND them? • Do you HIDE them away? From whom? • Do you GIVE them away? To whom?
Shopping Sites	
Where is your favorite place to shop?	Probes: • What do you like about that place?
Do you shop at SHOPPING MALLS?	Probes: IF YES • Which mall do you like to shop? • How often? • What do you like about that mall? • What do you generally do when you go to the mall? IF NO • Why not?
Have you received any CATALOGS?	Probes: IF YES • What do you do with catalogs when you get them at the mail? • Have you ordered anything from catalogs? • How often? • What kinds of things have you ordered from catalogs? IF NO Go to the next question.
Do you watch HOME SHOPPING NETWORK?	Probes: IF YES • How often do you watch them on TV? • Have you bought anything from them? • How often? • What kinds of things have you generally bought from them?

	• IF NO Go to the next question.
Do you have an access to the INTERNET?	Probes: IF YES • How often do you use the Internet? • How do you use the Internet? • Have you ordered anything from the Internet? • How often? • What kind of things have you ordered from the Internet? IF NO Go to the next question.
Shopping Companions	
Do you have anybody you shop with?	Probes: IF YES • Who do you shop with? • How often do you shop with this person? • Do you shop with this person when you go shopping just because you have an urge to go but not really need anything? IF NO • Do you prefer shopping by yourself? Why?
Do you shop differently when you shop by yourself and when you have somebody with you?	Probes: IF YES • What are the differences? Can you give me examples? IF NO Go to the next question.

Descriptions of Buying Urge	
Have you experienced a compelling urge to go shopping?	Probes: IF YES • How is it like when that urge occurs? • Where does the urge to shop generally occur? • How often does the urge to shop occur during a typical month? IF NO Go to the next question.
Have you experienced a compelling to buy something?	Probes: IF YES • How is it like when that urge occurs? • Where does the urge to buy generally occur? • How often does the urge to buy occur during a typical month? IF NO Go to the next question.

What trigger your appetite to buy or to shop for something?	Probes: • EVENTS Have any of your urges to shop been triggered by specific events? Give me examples? • OTHER PEOPLE Have any of your urges to shop been triggered by what you had seen or heard from someone you know? Give me examples? • MEDIA Have any of your urges to shop been triggered by what you had seen or heard from the media? Give me examples? • ADVERTISING Have any of your urges to shop been triggered by what you had seen or heard from advertising? Give me examples?
Control of Buying Urge	
Have you tried to control your thought about shopping or buying something once it occurs?	Probes: IF YES • How successful you have been in controlling those thoughts? • How do you control them? IF NO • What do you do once the urges to shop or to buy erupt and you cannot control it?
Do you go shopping immediately once an urge to shop occurs?	Probes: IF YES • How often did your shopping trip result in buying something you did not plan? IF NO • How long is the time interval between the time when the shopping urge occurs and the time when you actually go shopping?
Fluctuation of Moods	
What types of feelings do you have before you go shopping? Can you give me examples?	
How do you feel while you are shopping? Can you give me examples?	
Does your mood change while you are shopping? Can you give me examples?	
How do you feel after you go shopping or buy something in response to the compelling urges	Probes: If the feelings are POSITIVE • Do those feelings last long? • What do you feel after that? If the feelings are NEGATIVE • Do those feelings last long? • How do you deal with those feelings?

PART 1/3: Recovery from Compulsive Buying

When did you come to the DA program?	
How did you realize that you needed to be in the program?	Probes: • Suggestions from others? • Debts? • Emotional distress?
Do you have any relapse since you came to the program? That is, do you have any period of time when you don't come to the meetings?	Probes: IF YES • How many times have you relapsed? IF NO Go to the next question.
What is the total amount of time you are active in the program?	
Have your shopping habits changed since you come to DA?	Probes: IF YES • How have these changes come about? IF NO • How do you think the DA program benefits you?

PART 1/4: Shopping Development

When you grew up, who was the person closest to you?	Probes: • Tell me about that person. That is, how was that person like? • Has this person had any influence in your life?
How did you learn to shop?	
When did you learn to shop?	
Did you have anybody you shopped with at the earlier times in your life?	Probes: IF YES • Tell me about how that person shopped? • Do you see any difference or similarity between the ways you shop and the ways that person shops? IF NO • Why not so?
Have your shopping habits changed? That is, do you shop differently at the different times in your life?	Probes: IF YES • How so? IF NO Go to the next question.
Has your shopping become excessive at any time in your life?	Probes: IF YES • When did that happen? • How did the change come about? That is, can you think of any reason that made you shop excessively? *(Listen for life situations, influences of parents, friends, media, advertising, etc., and then probe for*

	each of the influences mentioned the interviewee.) IF NO Go to the next question.

PART 2: The roles of Mass Media and Advertising In Compulsive Buying

Media Use	
At earlier times in your life, did you: • Watch much TV? • Listen to much RADIO? • Read many NEWSPAPERS? • Read many MAGAZINES?	Probes: • TV: What kinds of program did you like to watch? Why? • RADIO: What kinds of programs did you like to listen to? Why? • NEWSPAPERS: What kinds of content did you like to read about in the newspapers? Why? • MAGAZINES: What types of magazines did you like to read? Why?
In the present, do you: • Watch much TV? • Listen to much RADIO? • Read many NEWSPAPERS? • Read many MAGAZINES?	Probes: *(Ask only for the types of media mentioned by the informants.)* • TV: What kinds of program do you like to watch? Why? • RADIO: What kinds of programs do you like to listen to? Why? • NEWSPAPERS: What kinds of content do you like to read about in the newspapers? Why? • MAGAZINES: What types of magazines do you like to read? Why?
Attitudes Toward the Mass Media	
How do you feel about the media?	
Is there anything in the media that concerns you?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? IF NO • Why not so?
Is there anything about the images portrayed in the media that concerns you?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? IF NO • Why not?
What is the image of "good life" do you think being portrayed in the media? That is, according to what you see in the media, what do you think would make a person happy and fulfilled?	Probes: • When have these ideas come about? • Are the ideas that you have now different from the ones you had at earlier times in your life? If YES, How so? If NO, Go to the next probe. • How do you compare these images to reality? That is, how do you compare the kinds of the life-style portrayed in the

	media to the ways people actually live to?
How do you feel about the educational role of the media? That is, do you think people learn something by exposing to the media?	Probes: IF YES • What kinds of the things do you think people learn from the media? Can you give me examples? IF NO • Why not so?
Mass Media Influences on Shopping	
Do you think that the media have any influences on your life?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? IF NO • Why not so?
Do you think that the media have any influences on your shopping habits?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? IF NO • Why not so?

Exposures to Advertising	
What do you generally do with advertising when it comes up while you: • Watch TV? • Listen to the RADIO? • Read NEWSPAPERS? • Read MAGAZINES?	
What do you generally do when you: • Get a CATALOG? • Get calls from TELEMARKETER? • See an INTERNET AD?	
Do you watch HOME SHOPPING NETWORK?	Probes: IF YES • What do you generally do when you watch HOME SHOPPING NETWORK? IF NO Go to the next question.
Do you use the INTERNET?	Probes: IF YES • What do you do when you see the ads on the INTERNET? IF NO Go to the next question.
Attitudes Toward Advertising	
How do you feel about advertising?	Probes: • How about COMMERICALS? • How about RADIO SPOTS? • How about NEWSPAPER ADS? • How about MAGAZINE ADS? • How about CATALOGS? • How about TELE-MARKETING? • What do you think about HOME

	SHOPPING NETWORK? • How about the INTERNET ADVERTISING?
Is there anything about advertising that concerns you?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • If there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences? IF NO • Why not so?
Is there anything about the images being portrayed in advertising that concerns you?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • IF there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences? IF NO • Why not?
What is the image of "good life" do you think being portrayed in the ads? That is, according to what you see in the ads, what do you think would make a person happy and fulfilled?	Probes: • When have these ideas come about? • Are the ideas that you have now different from the ones you had at earlier times in your life? If YES, How so? If NO, Go to the next probe. • How do you compare these images to reality? That is, how do you compare kinds of the life-style portrayed in the ads to the ways people actually live? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • If there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences?
How do you feel about the educational role of advertising? That is, do you think people learn anything by exposing to the ads?	Probes: IF YES • What kinds of the things do you think people learn from advertising? Can you give me examples? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • IF there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences?

	IF NO • Why do you think that advertising has nothing to do with educating people?
Influences of Advertising on Shopping	
Do you think that the advertising has any influences on your life?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • IF there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences? IF NO • Why not so?
Do you think that advertising has any influences on your shopping habits?	Probes: IF YES • How so? Can you give me examples? • Is your idea applied to every kind of advertising or just limited to certain kinds of advertising? • IF there are the differences between different kinds of advertising, what are the differences? IF NO • Why not so?

EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I. How old are you?
R. I'm 46.
I. Are you married, single, or...?
R. Divorced.
I. Um...you have any children?
R. No...no children.
I. Um...how long have you been married, and how long have you been divorced?
R. Um...I was married for nine years, and I have been divorced for 17 years.
I. How old were you when you...um...when you get married?
R. Um...I was 18...(laugh).... That was dumb. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) You don't want to do it again?
R. NO.
I. Rally!?
R. Not that young. I wouldn't advice anyone.
I. Um...what is your occupation?
R. I work at a bank.
I. OK. Like...what...what kind of position you do at the bank?
R. It's a branch...kind of like a branch manager...like there are many branches in K-mart stores, so I run a branch.
I. Um...how do you like your work?
R. I love my work.
I. How long have you worked there?
R. Um...ten years.
I. OK. Um...what do you do before that?
R. Um...I was actually two things. I was...a picture framer. I was a manager of a picture-frame shop for a long time, and I was for a while a secretary for a vice president for a firm.
I. OK. You said that you are.... You said that you grew up in Granite City?
R. Yes.
I. Where is that?
R. It's right across the river from St. Louis. It's just south of Edwardsville, Illinois.
I. And...how long have you moved to St. Louis?
R. After I was married.
I. How you like it here?
R. I like it.
I. OK. Can you tell me about you occu...I mean your education?
R. Um...I have a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, drawing and painting, and then I have a Master's degree in Counseling.
I. In Counseling!?
R. Yeah. (Laugh.) I skipped around a lot.
I. So, you do a lot of thing! (Laugh.)
R. I know. (Laugh.)

I. So, have you been, you know, doing any counseling to...other people?
R. Um...actually, right now I...um...I was. I did for a while right out of school, um...it was difficult to find the job...that would pay, so I stopped doing it. That's why I did the picture framing, and then...um...I am actually back at it again. I'm working with...um...an agency that works for disabled people.
I. And...um...can you tell me about your income. I mean...I don't need the number if you cannot tell me, but tell me how is your income doing.
R. Um...well, I can tell. I made about forty thousand a year.
I. Do you feel that...um...your income is adequate for you?
R. No. I am under-earning. (Laugh.)
I. OK. If you would have more income...um...what kind of thing you would like to do that...um...you cannot do right now?
R. Oh, if I was making more?
I. Right.
R. Um...I would want to...redecorate my condo.
I. OK.
R. (Laugh.)
I. OK. Is that all?
R. Oh, I would like to travel more.
I. What kind of travel that you like, you know...like in the country or out of the country?
R. Out of the country.
I. Um...where you like to go?
R. Europe.
I. Europe! Have you been there?
R. One time I was there.
I. Oh, where!?
R. I went to Austria and Italy.
I. Austria is beautiful, right?
R. Yes, it is. Gorgeous. I love it.
I. I always heard about Austria...that Austria is very beautiful.
R. It's very very clean. I was amazed how clean it is. There is no litter in the streets—nothing. It was amazing! (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) OK...let's see...um...can you tell me about your parents—what are their occupation, what are they doing right now?
R. Um...they're both retired. My father was...um...a school custodian, and my mother was a telephone operator.
I. OK. And they're both retired?
R. They're both retired.
I. And...they're never divorced or anything like that, right?
R. No. Actually, they have been married almost 51 years.
I. OK. And...do you have any brothers or sisters?
R. I have one brother.
I. Younger than you are?
R. Yes.

I. Are you close to your brother?
R. Very very close.
I. And he is back home, right?
R. Yeah.
I. Um...how old is your brother?
R. Forty-four.
I. And...are you close to your parents?
R. Um...not as close as with my brother, but kind of close, yeah.
I. OK. Can you tell me...um...how would you describe yourself?
R. I don't know. (Laugh.)
I. I mean who do you think you are?
R. Oh, let me think. Um...OK, I would say I'm a very fun person to be around. (Laugh.)
I. That sounds like it.
R. I'm a lot of fun. Um...I'm...I'm pretty smart. Um...I have a lot of energy, and I laugh a lot. Um...I like to be...I like to be in conversation with people...that are...interesting, not boring conversation, and I like to learn a lot. I'm always leaning something new.
I. Concerning what? Um...what kind of area that you like to learn?
R. Um...almost everything. Um...I think that's why I keep changing...I keep changing job so much. (Laugh.) I get bored after a while, and primarily I really like...art...creative. I'm most interested in creative...pursuit,...um...and psychological. I'm very interested...maybe because of my counseling degree, and working...like right now I'm working with disabled people, and I'm very interested in...help people's minds work, the behaviors that they have, um...why people do some of the things they do...um..., and I'm also extremely interested in...in the art...fine art, creative writing, and acting, theatre. Um...all of that I'm very very interested in. (Laugh.) I have a lot of interests.
I. OK. Are you...are you a sensitive person?
R. Um...I would say yes. I'm not as sensitive as I used to be...um..., but I'm probably more sensitive than...um...some people.
I. Can you tell me what do you mean by being sensitive?
R. Um...I can get my feeling hurt...more easily, I think, than other people. I also...have empathy for people, I think, more so than some other people do,...um...so that things make me more sad. Events that happen to other people...I become very sad about...um...like watching the news or something, whereas some other people wouldn't even...thought of them at all.
I. OK. You told me that you always want to feel like everybody else...um...can you tell me how it is like. Do you thing what other people is like?
R. Um...when I was growing up, I grew...we grew up...very poor. We didn't have very much money, and I always felt like...that I wasn't as good as other people because I didn't have the things that they had, and...um...I think it takes me a lot of year...to figure that out and to know that now it doesn't matter what you have, you know, it's who you are...inside...that is more important, and...um...I didn't used to think that.

I. This is for my own interest...how old you have to be to get to that point?
R. (Laugh.) That's the question of the decade. I think...I don't think it has to do with years. I think it has to do with how...um...a person relate to their environment and react to life, and I...for many years...felt like...I was...more of a victim, and I would feel sorry for myself, because other people had things that I didn't have, and it took me a lot of lessons. I had...things happened to me...until it finally beat me to the head that...that it does not have nothing to do with what...what you have, and also have nothing to do with...what other people have. My relationship...to the world is the way I perceive it, and....this is a hard question to explain...um...if I think good of myself, then more...nice things will happen to me, and if I...also...believe that...um...all people are good...to start with, you know, I think better things happen to me. Does that make sense?
I. Yes. OK. And you said that...you answers bring me a lot of questions that I forgot. (Laugh.)
R. (Laugh.)
I. OK. You said that you feel like you were the victim, right,...can you tell me you are the victim of what?
R. Um...when I got divorced...I got married so young, and I also married a man who has a drinking problem, so...I think I felt like...it is my luck in life to be...unhappy, or I didn't deserve happiness, and that...um...that was just the way my life was going to be, and...um...and now I don't believe that, and I...think it helps my life out?
I. Um...what change all this...what change the way you look at life?
R. Um...I think a lot of different things happening to me. My divorce...changes things...um...and...my getting into DA...definitely changes things.
I. But you have been in DA only two and a half years, right?
R. Eighteen months.
I. Oh, a year and a half.
R. But that has changed my life more in the last year and a half than a lot of other things did...before that.
I. OK. What would be the basis that...the reason that you divorce?
R. Um...because he...he was an alcoholic.
I. OK. Can you...?
R. Well, actually not just one. I think, secondly, and I don't know if it was a direct result of his...drinking, but we never had any money. We never got to buy.... We were married for nine years. We were never to buy a house. We never had any kid,...um..., you know, it was like...we weren't moving toward anything, and...um...that was probably the biggest reason that I wanted to get a divorce, because I felt like...it...I wasn't moving forward.
I. OK. What he does as a career? I mean what he did?
R. Um...when I left, he was a Black Jack Dealer in Las Vegas....
I. What is that!?
R. Um...you know in Las Vegas, he dealt the card.
I. Oh.

R. Yeah...yeah. He moved there and I was supposed to move there with him, and I didn't. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.)
R. In stead I divorced him. (Laugh.)
I. And he moved anyway?
R. Yeah, he had moved, and I went out to visit him, but then when I came home, I thought...I can't do this, and so that's when I told him that I wanted a divorce, because...things had not been going very smooth anyway, and so that was kind of...the last.
I. OK. Would you describe yourself as being impulsive person?
R. Um...actually no. I...I give careful thoughts to everything before I do it.
I. OK. How about the way you shop?
R. That is totally impulsive. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.)
R. (Laugh.) That...I would...I wouldn't be going shopping and I stop somewhere and buy something.
I. (Laugh.) OK. Can you describe yourself as being a...compulsive...I mean obsessive-compulsive?
R. I...I can be, yes, about many things.
I. OK. Can you give me example?
R. Um...when I used to be a smoker, I used to smoke...two packs a day, so I...I couldn't just...smoke a couple of cigarettes. Um...I try to think.... Oh, let's see. My ex-husband was an alcoholic, and I dated...probably three or four more alcoholics. (Laugh.) Um...I also get.... When I get...um...when I get interested in something, I become obsessed with it for a while, and then all in a sudden my interest goes away.
I. OK. Do you know that the friends you date with are alcoholic before you met them or?
R. Ah-ha. I...I didn't know when...I started dating them that they were, and then I found out later after dating them that they were.
I. OK. Do you think other people see you the way you see yourself?
R. Um...actually yes and no, but I think...um...mostly no, because I...I talk to people before, and they see me as a...much more stable person...than I think that I am, and they see me as strong person. I had friends tell me that I am very strong,...um...depending on things that have happened to me, and...I don't think that I am, but they think I am.
I. OK. And how would you describe yourself in terms of self-esteem?
R. In terms of...?
I. Self-esteem.
R. Now?
I. Now and then...can you compare?
R. OK. I had ZERO, and especially growing up, but then the older that I got...the more self-esteem that I got. Until now...like I would say like when I grew up I had zero, but now I'd say...if you go to ten, I probably have eight. I think...I've got a lot...over the years that I didn't have before.

I. Is that form the DA?
R. Oh, that's part of it, and...um...just...I think...growing up is a part of it.
I. OK. Can you tell me is that the reason that...you feel that your self-esteem is zero because...you grew up having the things other people have...is that the reason?
R. UM...I think that was part of it. Um...I think the other part was because my parents were not...um...very demonstrative. They never said they love me, or my brother. They never hugged us or anything, so I grew up feeling like I wasn't loved,...um....and that...that's the way they are, but I used to get...to mean that...I was a bad person, and...I think that's one of the reason I think my self-esteem was so low.
I. OK. Did your brother have the same experience that you have?
R. Um...I...I would think so, but he turns out much differently than me. (Laugh.)
I. You mean...like in the good way, right?
R. Yeah. (Laugh.) He never marries an alcoholic,...(laugh)...um...and he has no problem with money. He saves money. He...spends money, but he also makes a lot more money than I do, and...I don't understand how...he did that. (Laugh.)
I. Maybe because he is a man. (Laugh.)
R. Um...we grow up together, and how come he turns out that way, and I turn out my way, you know.
I. But you don't turn out bad, you know.
R. Right. No. I...I think...I...I see myself as.... Over the year,...growing up the way that I did...with more painful...than...than he. Um...I seemed to feel more pain than he did.
I. Is he a sensitive person, I mean?
R. Um...I don't think he is as sensitive as I am.
I. How about your parents...I mean...are they are good parents?
R. Actually they are good parents. Um....
I. OK. Can you...at that time before you come to term with yourself...can you tell me what is the most important things to you? What do you think would make you happy then?
R. Um...right now?
I. Um...can you compare...like then and now?
R. Oh, OK. I thought back then...that...if I can find...like my prince charming..., that would make my life...perfect.
I. OK.
R. And now what I think is just finding...my true self inside me. That will make everything perfect. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.)
R. In stead of looking for a man to do it. It...it...I need to be...content with me.
I. OK. Can you describe what would be...you know, the characteristics of your prince charming?
R. Um...oh, he would have to be gorgeous....
I. (Laugh.)
R. (Laugh.) And very sexy,...and...um...very intelligent.
I. (Laugh.) They're not always go together.

R. I know.
I. How about...anything else?
R. Well, I would want him to be successful, and.... Did I say intelligent?
I. Yes.
R. That...that...intelligence is very important, um...and also happy with his life.
I. Happy with his life?
R. Yeah.
I. What if he...what if he, you know, intelligent and...be happy with his life, but he is not successful...would that make a prince charming?
R. Um...well, if he is happy with his life then I think that would be considered successful. You know, as long as he feel his successful in his life, not necessarily what other people judge him...to be as success.
I. OK. Can you tell me...about your shopping habit?
R. Well, let's see. I don't shop much anymore. (Laugh.) Um...before...what I would do, especially when I wasn't feeling very good, I would go shopping. When I was feeling down or depressed, I would always go buy something,...because I always felt that that would make me feel better. Um....
I. Did it?
R. It did for...like...ten minutes. (Laugh.) It didn't...it didn't last...um..., and then later on I would feel worse because...I spend all that money...that I didn't have to pay that, because I would charge everything. That was my problem that I would charge all these things, and...I didn't have the money to pay for it.
I. OK. And that stop when you come to DA?
R. Yes.
I. Really!?
R. Yes.
I. I mean...I think you have a very good DA program!
R. I think I felt like...I kind of hit a very low bottom, and I just...I actually just got myself to the point when I got sick owning money. I mean it makes me physically sick.
I. Really!?
R. Yeah. And I got to the point where I really don't miss buying things right now, which really surprises me, because I never used to be like that.
I. OK. Is it come in the sudden?
R. No, it was a gradual...it's a gradual thing. It gradually happens. The more I was in DA, and the more I started looking at things, and not...and not using money to make me feel better. When I started doing that...um...I started feeling better about myself.
I. OK. Would it be harder at the first?
R. It was very hard at first. Um...when I first.... I went to DA meeting for about a month...before I stopped charging. I even had this. I charged almost four hundreds dollars. It was like...this will be my last one. (Laugh.) I charged out of a catalog, and I said, "Okay, I'm not going use credit card anymore, but I'm gonna use them one more time," (laugh) and I did that and I get that out of my

system...you can say...um....and then...because I knew that I had to stop, and I thought the only that I can stop... That's how I quit smoking.

I. And that was the last time?

R. I haven't used my charge cards...for...a year and a half...August 15, '99.

I. OK. What kind of things that you buy? You said that you buy clothes, right?

R. I bought a lot of clothes, and I would buy.... I would...I would charge things...like I would take vacation and charged everything, and sometimes...a lot of time...when I needed a car repair or something that I didn't have the money for, but I needed it, I would charge them. Um...so it got to the point that I was charging...almost everything.

I. So are you still paying out on that now?

R. I'm still paying on it.

I. OK. Are you...? OK, when you buy the clothes, are you particular about the brand or?

R. Um...most of the time, yeah. I...if I wasn't, it was because it was on sale. A lot time I would buy things because they are on sale.

I. OK. How...how often did you go shopping, then?

R. Oh, my goodness! At least once a week.

I. OK. And...so you shop for yourself mostly, right?

R. Yeah, most of the time. Um...I also would buy things for friends or family...um...like presents...um...like birthday's presents, Christmas presents. I would end up buying something that...that was more expensive...than I really could afford, but it was something I wanted to get them, so I would charge it.

I. OK. Do you still think that you have to do that?

R. No, actually I don't.

I. OK. What...why would it important for you that you have to give them those things?

R. I wanted them to love me.

I. OK.

R. I...I felt like if I gave them something really nice, then they would know that I love them, and they would love me back, and...it was kind of expectant...kind of thing.

I. OK. Was that successful? I mean would that change anything?

R. Um...actually no. It didn't work. (Laugh.)

I. (Laugh.) OK. So, do you stop doing that a year and a half ago, right, or before that?

R. Yes. Now, actually what I try to do is.... Because I've gone through.... This will be my second Christmas not charging anything. And what I try to do now is to think of something...that they would really like...that I can afford, and a lot of time, I might make something...that means.... It makes it more special, more sentimental,...um...which would be...mean more to them...not in dollars, but in...in...in just being special, you know, like a family thing or something.

I. OK. Do you have a lot of friends?

R. Yes.

I. OK. Is that always or...?

R. Yeah, actually I think so. I always have a lot of friends.
I. OK. Since when that you...? You begin to buy a lot of things, you know, clothing or things like that, I mean...how old were you when you started doing that?
R. Um...it was after I got divorced.
I. OK.
R. I didn't do that. I didn't shop...very much when I was married, because we didn't have much money, but when I got.... So, I would say was.... I was twenty-seven when I got divorce, so...and then that was when I got my first credit card.
I. So, after you got divorce, you would buy mostly clothing, right?
I. Yes. I bought a stereo and I charged on that once.
I. What would prompt that? I mean the divorce is something you want to do, right, but what would prompt you to shop or spend money or something like that?
R. Um...most of the time, it was because. Well, it was one of two things that...I was feeling really sad for...for some reasons and I wanted to feel better, or sometimes I would have a great day and felt wonderful....
I. OK.
R. You know...that's why I was shopping all the time, because you either feel good or feel bad, and that's what I did.
I. OK. Do you...when you shop for the clothes or something...how...how do you decide what to shop for? I mean how do you decide what type of style that you like?
R. I...never actually went out thinking I was gonna buy one particular thing. I was just...went out...looking to see what was on sale and what was out there, so I was never...unless it was Christmas shopping or something, I was never actually went...out with an...intent on...buying...a specific thing.
I. So, you just kind of going out hang in the mall?
R. Yeah, I would go and...like browse, yeah.
I. How often when you go like that and you end up buying up buying something?
R. Oh, probably I did it...probably once a week.
I. OK. And do you end up buying things every time when you go?
R. I would say, "Yeah," or I would say...there was one out of fifty times I didn't buy something, so...it wasn't...it wasn't very often. Most of the time...almost all the times, I bought something.
I. OK. Um...when you shop and buy things, you mentioned that you feel bad about it, and...most of the time what did you do with the things that you bought?
R. Um...most of the time...it was kind of funny because...I would...buy something, but I didn't use it right away. I would...kind of...I would keep it for like a couple of weeks before I even use. If it is clothing, it would be.... Sometimes I use it right away, but most of the time, it would sit in my closet for a little bit before I use it.
I. OK. But you always end up using them, right?
R. Yeah. There might have been...a couple of things I never did. Most of the time I did.
I. OK. So, where is your favorite place that you go shopping?

R. I used to be Macy's.
I. OK. So, what do you like about Macy's?
R. Um...I always felt like...I was...I was part of...like...the elite group, if I shop there.
I. (Laugh.)
R. (Laugh.) I know it is weird.
I. No, it is not...it is not.
R. I did, you know, I...I was like part of...upper class. I shopped there.
I. OK. Now, let's me go back. Do you have a lot of clothing or toys or something like that when you grew up?
R. No.
I. OK.
R. In fact, I hardly had any, and the clothes I did have were my cousin's. They were handed me down.
I. OK. So beside the shopping malls...um...do you shop at the catalog?
R. Oh, yeah. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) OK. Can you tell me...like what kind of things you buy from catalog, and how often?
R. Um...before...um.... Now if I buy something from the catalogs, I only pay for it, so I don't charge for anything, so I don't do that very often. Sometimes I get Christmas presents or birthday presents. I used to, a lot, get a clothes and...things for the house...like a little...like little nick-knack or things for the house,...um...or like a lamp, you know, something like that. Most of the time, it was...it was mainly clothes, but I also bought things for the house.
I. OK. Do you like decorate the house?
R. Oh, I love to decorate the house.
I. You didn't study interior design, right?
R. No, I didn't. My mom wanted me to. (Laugh.) She would have liked that, but....
I. OK. Do you order anything from the Home Shopping Network?
R. No, I never did.
I. Do you watch them?
R. No. I never...got into that.
I. OK. Now you have access to the Internet, right?
R. Yes.
I. You buy anything from the Internet?
R. Yes.
I. OK. What you buy from the Internet?
R. I sent flowers to my mom...um...on the Internet. I bought...a couple of things for my pets. I have two cats. Um...I bought...um...mainly gifts for other people. I don't know that I've bought anything for me...on the Internet. Oh, I bought the hard drive...a couple of years ago...I bought that.
I. OK. How long have you...stopped buying something from the Internet?
R. Um...I haven't stopped. I buy from it once in awhile, but only when I can afford it, yeah.
I. OK. And how long since you started buying things from the Internet?
R. Um...probably...may be like three years ago.

I. OK. When you go shopping at the shopping mall, do you have anybody that you go with?
R. Um...I did,...probably I'd say like half of the time. Half of the time I would and half of the time I wouldn't.
I. OK. Who do you go with if you go with somebody?
R. Um...I used to go with one specific girlfriend. We used to go shopping all the time.
I. OK. And she love shopping too?
R. Yeah. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.)
R. But she is not in DA. She should be. (Laugh.)
I. Oh, OK. Do you prefer shopping with other people or do you prefer shopping by yourself?
R. Um...I actually like it better when I'm by myself?
I. OK. Why?
R. Because I can stop and look at the things I want to, and...then I don't have to stop looking at the things (laugh) they want to.
I. (Laugh.) Oh, OK.
R. (Laugh.)
I. Do you think that you shop differently when you shop with other people and when you shop by yourself?
R. Um...actually, yes, I do think that. Um...if I went with my friends,...sometimes they talk me into buying something that...if I went by myself I would not have got it, but because they thought it was very cool or something, and I ended up buying it.
I. OK. Do you feel like...you are more into the shopping when you go by yourself than when you go with somebody?
R. I think...I'm more...um...I more focus on...what I want to get. When I am with friends, I looked at things just to be looking at them, and I don't know that I have something specific in mind.
I. OK. This is what I get after I interview other people that...that when they are in the DA, they are also in Overeater Anonymous, now do you in other Twelve Steps?
R. No. Now, a long time ago when I was married, I was in Ala-Non, but I haven't been in that...for...oh, gosh...over ten years.
I. Now your parents are not alcoholic, right?
R. No. I don't know where that came from. (Laugh.)
I. OK. So, you don't have problem with overeating?
R. No. I never...I never have any eating problems, although sometimes I would tend not to eat very much because of the whole skinny thing. I always try to be skinny, but I never...I never have any eating disorder.
I. You mentioned one time that...um...you like to shop at Macy's because you think you want to be part of the elite group that shop there...can you tell...can you tell me why...um...people who shop at Macy's is the elite group? I mean, how that idea comes about?

R. Um...um...I think for two things, I think. One is...when I was growing up, I was...there was store kind of like Macy's...in St. Louis when I was growing up, and...only the people who have money went there, so...for me going to Macy's symbolizes I have money too, and...um...I think it was just...it was the people that I knew that shop at store like that, I...equate with...that store with being successful and having money.
I. And...you remember how old...um...when you have that idea come about?
R. Oh, probably like...young...like eleven or twelve.
I. OK. So, you never go there yourself, right?
R. I...I didn't. No, until I got older. My...my parents never did because...we couldn't afford to.
I. OK...ok. Um...do you see any...image of Macy's or...or that kind of store from some other sources beside you know it from your experience?
R. Image of Macy's...?
I. Yes...OK...you said that you...you associate Macy's with the...with the elite group, I just wonder if you...um...you got the idea from...from something else beside your real life experience?
R. Oh! Um...maybe...um...maybe I like...I like expensive things, (laugh) so I can always know when something is expensive because I usually like it. (Laugh.)
I. Oh! OK. (Laugh.) I do too.
R. I don't like cheap stuffs. (Laugh.)
I. Um...anything else?
R. Um...no.... I guess just...I think just...a general...growing up that I learn from like watching other people...um...what stores were like...the nice stores, what store weren't the nice stores.
I. And then....
R. But I don't know if I can pinpoint it, you know.
I. Yes, I...I can under stand that. OK...can you...can you define...what do you mean by the elite group?
R. Um...they are...people who make...who live in very nice, large houses, and make a lot of...and make enough money to be able to...go on vacation, drive a nice car, belong to a country club...um doctor, lawyer.
I. OK. Where...OK...can you tell me generally where do you get the idea about this? I mean...how do you learn now this is the elite group?
R. Um...there were.... I was in Catholic school when I was growing up, and there were different classes of people at this Catholic school, and...there were some family that I knew. I knew where they lived, and they had big houses, and...you can tell on Sunday when we go to the churches that they had nicer clothes, so I started...getting the impression...very young when I saw families that didn't look like our family.
I. OK. And....
R. And also I think just from the media and television and movies, you saw...you can tell the differences between the people who had money and people who didn't.

I. Um...how would you compare...you said that you see what is in real life and what comes from the media, which one seems to have more impact on your thinking about it?

R. Um...I think...I think the family and the church that I sent to. Seeing it first hand has more of an impact than the movies. That didn't seem like real life.

I. Then...are you Catholic?

R. Yes, I am.

I. OK. Are you still Catholic now?

R. Um...not really. I don't go to church like I used to, yeah.

I. Can you tell me a little about your religion belief?

R. Um...I believe in God.

I. You mean like Jesus?

R. No, I don't believe. I wouldn't consider myself Christian because I don't really believe in the Bible. I...believe more in.... There is a...a God like...um...in the Universe, and I...I do believe that there is like guardian angles, but I think of them more like guardian spirits...that kind of thing,...um...and I...I believe that...the energy that we all have...inside of us contribute to the Universe's energy, so that...um...what you do can...um...affect the world, and...what you think of yourself...can affect...can also affect the world because if you don't feel good about yourself, you are not...you're gonna miss the potential...of doing the things you...that are possible for you to do because you don't think you can do them. Um...so it more of a spirituality that I have than a.... Sometimes I think I believe in the Bible because I went to Catholic school, and I was...(laugh)...brainwashed, but I think...I think deep down when I think about it, I really.... There must have been a Jesus. I think there mush have been because they wouldn't have wrote the whole book about it, you know, but I don't know that he was...what they call the Son of God, and...and I don't know how true the stories are. I think...and I think when I read the Bible, I think of the stories more as...um...moral, you know, like it teaches the lessons, but that it not...actually happens. I don't know that...I don't really believe that Jesus actually, you know, turned a thousand loafs of bread, you know, one bread into a thousands loafs of bread or one fish into a thousand fishes. I think that there...there is...a lesson in that story that we need to learn, but not to take it literally, so I wouldn't say...I really have a particular religion.

I. OK. Now, when you were younger...when you were in Catholic school and...do you...you believe in Bible at all?

R. Um...when I was very very young. The older I got the more I didn't believe in it.

I. OK. Can you tell me at what point that...you...you kind of think about...God that's more something more spiritual or power or energy in the Universe, and you are part of that energy...can you tell me when...at what age exactly when you...kind of come to believe this?

R. Um...probably late high school, like maybe when I was sixteen or seventeen.

I. OK. Where do you got this idea?

R. I...by...by reading other teachings. Um...I started reading, and...actually like when I was in high school and in college. It started then, but I don't think...I really...I really connected with it until, you know, I was in college, and that's when I

started...thinking in terms...more so of, because I started reading other books, and I take classes like philosophy classes, and I read like...Buddhism and I read,...but I studied some in Catholic school, where we had...um...religion class everyday, and one year we had preacher who taught us that...um...would teach us different religion, like he taught us about Judaism, the Indians...what the Indians believe. He did,...and that was...in seventh grade...I was probably like twelve or thirteen. That was really...the first beginning when I started thinking...that...I didn't really believe in the Bible, because he started showing us what the other religions were like. And...I started thinking more, like...they are not going to hell just because they don't believe in the Bible even though there're some people in the Catholic church that would say that they would. (Laugh.) That's the beginning when I started believing that, but I think it was fermented when I was in college.

I. And that's for the...Bachelor degree, is that what you mean?

R. Yeah. So, I would have been in my early twenty...twenty, twenty-one. And I started studying psychology too. It's just the combination of all...of that because I was a psychology minor, so I started studying different theories and,...you know. I...I took a lot of classes that...help me to think, "Oh, no...maybe what I'm thinking isn't so bad," because...see when I was in high school and going to Catholic...school, I would...when I think these things, I would think, "No, I can't think that because that makes me a bad person," you know.

I. Yeah. OK...are your...are your family religious?

R. Very religious. My mom and dad still go to...churches every Sunday.

I. OK. How about your brother?

R. He doesn't go to church at all. (Laugh.)

I. OK. You said something about...like, "I'm not like everybody else," when you grew up because you don't have toys or something like that...can you tell me how old were you when you...become conscious of that?

R. I was...I was in seventh grade, and...I know exactly when it happened.

I. Can you tell me about it?

R. Yes. When...I went with a friend of mine, her name was Lauren, with her family, to...um.... They have like a.... There was a house. There was almost like a farm, by a little stream, and...it was a summer house...something like that. Um...they have more money than my parents did. She took me for a day on this trip. We went...um...to this house, and...there was at one point, I was...holding the hand of her little brother, and then...Lauren has the other hand of her little brother. We were crossing the stream, and...he slipped, and he got his shoes wet, and...he got...he started crying. He was like three or something, and...her mom would gave me this look...like...it was my fault, and...I think it was because also it was like I didn't have the clothes that they have, and...um...you know, I didn't...I wasn't...in the class that they were in. I mean she gave me that kind of look through the whole visit, and I never...did anything with that family again, and...and Lauren wasn't...wasn't a very close friend to me after that either, so her mama must have said something, and I...I think it was because...I didn't have.... That's what it felt like. It felt like it was because I didn't have...the money and the things...that they did, so I wasn't good enough.

I. And...she was your close friend before that trip, right?
R. Yeah...fairly close—not like best friend or anything, but we were pretty close friend.
I. OK. Do you ever get to talk to her about it after that?
R. No, I never said anything about it. I think I felt kind of ashamed like I have done something wrong, and...so, I never mentioned it, she never mentioned it, and then we went of into kind of different groups. She got a different group of friends, and then...because we were both in Catholic school then, and I was in seventh grade, so in eighth grade, we graduated and went to public schools, so we kind of went our separated ways.
I. OK. Now, do you believe that it was true that how you feel that...she gave you that kind of look...because you didn't have the things they have?
Actually, kind of yeah. Um...I...I think because that was the kind of person she was, but see I don't really know her very well. That was her mom. It's not like we hung out and talk to each other, so that's actually only my perception, so...I...I don't know that...I don't know for a fact that's true. It just still feel like that today, but it may be just because it's not resolved, you know.
I. And...before that you are innocent about it and after that you become conscious about it?
R. Yeah. That's when I started looking at...um...what other people had compared to what I had.
I. Have you ever talked with your mom and dad about it?
R. Oh,...no. No. That wasn't something...that was discussed, and...and they don't...even today when I talk about money, they don't want to talk about me being in DA. They don't want to talk about it.
I. They know that, right?
R. My mom does. I don't know if my dad...has she ever told my dad, but I would assume she didn't, although she tells him everything...she might have, but...um...whenever I was bringing up on the phone like when we were in conversation on the phone, she kind of don't want to talk about it. She would change the subject.
I. OK. Um...so, when you grew up...is your mom close to you? You have anybody that you are close to that you can, you know, talk to when you have something?
R. When I was growing up?
I. Yeah.
R. No.
I. OK.
R. And I think that...contributed to...my feeling very isolated.
I. You were not even close to your mom?
R. No. We weren't close to her at all. I'm much closer to her now,...um...but when I was growing up, we weren't close at all.
I. How about your brother, were you close when you grew up?
R. Um...when we growing up, we were...kind of close.
I. So, how did you learn to shop?

R. Um...I kind of learn on my own because...we didn't really.... I started shopping once in awhile when I was in High School with my girlfriends. That's what you did when you went shopping. Then, I got married right out of high school, and...we didn't have any money, so I didn't really start shopping then. I don't think I started shopping until I got divorced, and...that's when I started to feel like...I was like other people, because there was another thing that I think make me feel separated was that I never went shopping like other people did because I didn't have the money. So, when I got out of college, and I started getting credit cards, because they started sending me credit cards when I got to college,...um...that's when I started feeling like I'm finally grown up. I'm like everybody else. I didn't have credit card while I was married.

I. OK. How old were you when you got your first car?

R. I think...I was...twenty eight.

I. After you divorce?

R. Yes.

I. OK. When you in college or in high school, do you go to shopping mall with your girlfriends at all?

R. Um...they...actually didn't have shopping mall back then. (Laugh.) I'm dating myself, (laugh.)...but...yeah, they didn't actually have shopping mall back then. Um...sometimes they have shopping center, and I would go out once in awhile, but I grew up in a small town that didn't have very many stores in it. So, it wasn't big thing. The big thing to do when to go shopping was to go across the river to St. Louis, and...that was like a big deal...a big important thing. We didn't really have too many stores where I grew up, but I grew up right outside.... I didn't actually grew up in the city of St. Louis. It was...um...across the river in the small town.

I. OK. So, when you shop you did not have anybody to shop with when you start out after divorce?

R. No. I actually went shopping by myself.

I. OK. Can you tell me how much time do you spend thinking about shopping at that time?

R. Probably...that's when I first discover that...shopping makes me feel better, and I...I also started to think, when I got my credit cards that I can start to be like everybody else, because that's the only way I could afford. I wasn't making enough money. I was under-earning, and so that way I looked at it as the way to be able to afford whatever everybody else has.

I. OK. And that is when you worked as the picture-framer, right?

R. Right.

I. OK. Um...at the early time in your life...um...what kind of mass media that you tend to use?

R. In the early time in my life?

I. Yes, like when you grew up.

R. Um...probably movies.

I. More that tv?

R. More than tv, yeah.

I. Oh, like you go to the movie theatre?
R. Yeah. A lot.
I. You go by yourself?
R. No. Go with friends or brothers, or my mom and dad., but I think...I probably when I was growing up I saw movies than I saw tv.
I. Do you see a lot of tv?
R. Um...growing up?
I. Yeah. I mean what are you talking about when you are teenager or something like that when you went to see movies.
R. Um...I was thinking.... I went to see a lot of movies when I was younger like when I was...like from age eight to like...maybe twelve, then I started watching more tv?
I. More tv after twelve?
R. Yeah, and mainly I thought was because I wasn't allowed to stay up very late, so..., but I can see movies during the day.
I. OK. So, after the age of twelve until when that you watch a lot of tv?
R. Oh, until now.
I. Until now!?
R. Yeah, actually I watch a lot of tv now.
I. OK. What kind of tv program that you like to watch?
R. Mainly drama.
I. Can you give me example of the title you watch?
R. Oh, sure. Like *The Practice*,...um...*ER*,...um...*The X Files*,...um...*Family Law*,...*Judging Amy*, *The West Wing*, and *Ally McBield*. Um...once in a while I watch sitcoms. I used to like *Seinfeld* a lot. It is not on anymore. Um...and that's probably pretty much it. There are certain shows that are on, like I used to watch *Friends*, but I don't really watch them much anymore.
I. Why not?
R. The don't interest me anymore. Um...and...but part of that...has to do with my...my viewing habit. I get a little tired of things after awhile, like...I used to watch *ER* constantly. I wouldn't miss the show, and now it's okay if I miss one, you know, that kind of thing. I...I like things at the very beginning, and then I started to loose interest after awhile.
I. Do you watch that show...*Once and Again*?
R. Oh, I do. I forgot about that. You watch that one?
I. Yeah.
R. You like that one?
I. Yeah.
R. Yeah, and sometimes I tape them, like if I know I'm not gonna be home to see them. Oh, and I do watch a couple of like...the teen shows, like I like *Buffy*, and I watch *Dawson Creek*, pretty often. Let's me think what else.... Buffy has that new angel. Sometimes I tape those, because I don't watch too much tv on Tuesday night, because I'm not at home. Um...once in awhile...I...I used to love *Who Want to Be a Millionaire* the first year it came out. I watch every show, and

I haven't watch it since. (Laugh.) It's like the first year when things come out, I really like, and then...for some reason, I get bored with it. I don't know why.

I. How about when you were younger...like after the age of twelve, what kind of tv show that you like to watch?

R. Um...I probably like to watch more comedies.

I. Like situation comedies?

R. Yeah, like *Mash, All in the Family*, and...um.. *Mary Tylor Moor*. I love that show. Those kinds of show I watched more when I was growing up,...um...and a lot of the time I had to watch what my parents watched, so I had to watch like *Madlock* a lot because my dad liked it, you know, The Fugitive, and...what else he liked...., and...pretty much when we lived there we had to do what they said, so usually we didn't get to watch the shows we wanted to, unless they said, "Oh, go ahead." We had to watch what they...not actually they...it was my dad. My mom was pretty...easy going, but my dad...we pretty much had to watch what he wanted to watch.

I. Oh. And what do you like about *Mary Tylor Moor* show?

R. Um...it was funny. The writing was very good,...um...and it was also nice to see...a woman in the lead role, because you didn't see much of that when I was growing up.

I. How about other kind of media besides tv and the movie, do you listen to much radio when you grow up?

R. No. I...most of the time if I had the radio on, it was always music, so I didn't really, and still don't really listen to...like talk radio at all. Um...I read a lot.

I. OK. What kind of thing you read?

R. Um...oh, gosh. I read...I read a lot of novel, like I just finished the book, *Poisonwood Bible*.

I. Oh, is that good?

R. It was very good. I really like it, yeah. I'm in a book club that meet once a month, and the next book we're going to read—I have to buy it; I haven't bought it yet—is called Wild Swan, and it's about three generations of Chinese women, I think...um.... So, I read a lot of novel like that. I read a lot of...kind of like self-help books, and I also like to read...um.... I read some spiritual books, like I'm reading a Gary Zukov's book right now.

I. Oh, yeah. Do you like him?

R. I like him a lot, and then...I have in the past read some...kind of metaphysical books, and...and that actually when I started reading those started to...um...solidify more...what...how I felt that, you know, God was just like the universal energy,...um...because that...that kind of what they believed too.

I. OK. Now, do always follow Oprah Book Club's advice?

R. Um...I probably would, yeah. I read a couple of what she said, although I don't follow all her books,...um...but I read a couple, and I just got into this book club a couple of months ago, so I now I'm kind of reading what they're reading.

I What they do in the book club...I mean I'm just curious?

R. It really...it's really neat. I almost I'm back in college again, which I really like. We read the book, and then we meet...um...we meet once a month, so we give

ourselves a month to read a book, and...um...we talk about it. We talk about what we like, what we didn't like, and then everybody rates it...like from a scale from one to ten, and how...good they thought the book was. It's nice to be about to discuss with other people.

I. I mean do you have to be intellectual to belong to a book club?

R. No. This is just like a general...book club. Yeah, just friends that I knew.

I. They set that up by themselves?

R. Yeah, they did. They started it one day. I came in later. They have been doing it longer than I have, but I found that out through a friend of mine, and...she said she goes to this book club, so I just started going with her, and I really like it.

I. OK. I go out of my interview now...I'm just curious.

R. Oh, OK. (Laugh.)

I. What do you like about that...what do you call...*Bible*...?

R. Oh, *Poisonwood Bible*.

I. Yeah. I had wanted to buy it, I think it might be boring, you know what I mean.

R. Oh, I didn't finding it boring at all.

I. Really!?

R. Um...it was...it was interesting to read her characters. It was a little long. I think she dragged it out a little bit too long. Um...it was nice that she had a lot of history in it...in terms of.... There is an event that happened in the book, and then they family are kind of...split and go in separate ways, and she followed each individual family members after that, but that when it started to drag a little bit of what she went into...um...you know, the history of what happened to everyone.... It's great to find out what would happen to them, but...it kind of dragged on a little too long.

I. Is it kind of attack on the *Bible*?

R. Um...kind...not so much on the Bible as.... There is definitely attack on...um...zealous...Christians...in it, and that...that was the part...that I think...um.... Well, I kind of identify with that part, (laugh.) because I knew people like that...going to Catholic School, and...um...I don't think anyone should impose...what they believe on someone else, you know. It is up to each individual person to decide what they want to believe and what they don't want to believe, and you shouldn't make someone believe,...because you believe it, and...there...is kind of character like that in there, and I think I kind of identify with, and the father...is very...strict, and very domineering, so I identify with that, because that's the way my father was.

I. Oh!.

R. So, there was something in there like that...that I identify with, and there are four daughters in the story, so they're all female, and...you can...I can more easily identify with female than with male. It's kind of nice to be able to read...about...female experiences.

I. OK. You mentioned something about your father that...he is kind of domineering...is he really that way?

R. Yes.

I. OK. In terms of what?

R. Um...(laugh)...my father's very racist. He's like...Archie Bunker.
I. Oh!. (Laugh.)
R. That was one of the thing...that when that show came out, my brother and I...kind of looked at each other, "My God, it's dad." (Laugh.) It's like they put camera in our house. Um...he's very...very prejudice, and he's very settle in his...opinion, and he...he's very strict. He did not want me to date...until I was like...eighteen. Um...he would set curfew on me in high school...like ten o'clock at night. All my friends can stay out like...until eleven or twelve, and he couldn't understand...like..., "So what," and...so there was constant battle...between him and I when I was growing up, because he didn't want me to grow up, which it would be really hard, because he...just tried to set all these limits...on me, and...um...I would rebel, and...so we would fight. We fought a lot.
I. How about now/
R. Now...we're much.... Actually, we are closer than we used to be, and he is...mellow a lot. He is not as...um...rigid as he used to be. Yeah, the older he got, the better. Um...he also got older, and he...he...he is not well. He's kind of sick, so...I think he kind of...look at things different now, compared to the way he used to.
I. Now, your mom is not like Archie Bunker's wife, right?
R. Oh, yeah.
I. Is she that way!?
R. Oh, yeah. My mom was very much like her. She...in fact, a lot of people...that I knew growing up.... She's a very nice lady, and she is very easy-going, and she pretty much...do whatever my dad wanted her to do.
I. Oh, really!?
R. Yeah. And, so that was the bad role model for me. I would get mad at her, and I would say, "Don't...don't let him treat you like this." And...and it would make me mad because.... I think that's why...to a certain degree...I became...a feminist. That was because I saw how my father...treat my mother, and I...I didn't...think it was right that he treated her like that.
I. OK. Now beside novels, do you read any...newspapers and magazines?
R. Um...there's only.... I have only two magazine subscriptions. One is called *Ute Reader*, and the other one...*Oprah* magazine, and that the only two magazines that I read regularly. Every once in a while, I might pick up *Times* or *Newsweek*. Um...yeah, that's pretty much it. I read the newspapers as often as I can. I don't...generally have time.
I. OK. What do you like about...the Oprah magazine?
R. Um...I like...the...um...the articles on...on helping yourself, and working on yourself, and...and...things like that. She has a lot of articles about like that,...um...and I like that.
I. OK. How about at the early time in your life...what kind...do you read any magazines when you grew up?
R. Well, when I was growing up, I used to read *Seventeen*. (Laugh.) I will get that one, and then when I was in college...I read a lot of.... I...I had...I used the *Smithsonian*, and *Psychology Today*, and...*Ms* magazine, when they used to have

Ms magazine. I don't even know if they still have it anymore, because I never see it,...um...but I use to read that,...um...and...another one called "*The Nation*," like a political...magazine.

I. OK. Um...how old were you when your read *Seventeen* magazine?

R. Probably from the time I was about...like fourteen until I was about...maybe...eighteen or nineteen?

I. OK. Do you remember what did you like about that magazine (*Seventeen*)?

R. Oh, I loved looking at the clothes, and...see...and thinking that I could be pretty. I wanted to look like them.

I. OK. But you did not get the chance to go to the shopping mall then, right?

R. Not...as often as I did later in life, but I still would. I mean most weekend I would go shopping, yeah, because there wasn't a lot else to do...in the town I grew up in.

I. OK. Do you watch a lot of news on tv?

R. Yes, I do. I watch a lot of news on tv.

I. Is that like from...local or national?

R. Both.

I. OK. How about when you grew up?

R. I...I watched a lot of news. My...my parents watched a lot of news.

I. OK. Do you...sometimes they have women on newscast that they dress up very professional way, do you get any fashion idea from those newscasts?

R. Um...not normally. Probably...I got more of my...professional-type dressing from...um...watching actual politicians, and...um...also people who play business people, in the movie and on tv.

I. Oh, like tv drama?

R. Yeah, like on the Practice. I'll look at their suites and things,...or...or in real life, but I didn't look at the newscasters how they dress.

I. OK. And...what do you like about Ally McBield show?

R. I...I think I like it...the way they portray...women...looking for men to marry. That seems very true to life. (Laugh.)

I. (Laugh.) Yeah.

R. Unfortunately, but it does. I think...most...a lot of women are...um...pretty much obsessed with finding a husband, and in fact, I know...I have been that way before...that I really wanted to find...someone to spend my life with, and I know friends who are like that, so...I think it is very true to life.

I. I think it seems abnormal if you are not. (Laugh.)

R. (Laugh.) It is only in that respect, but in the respect that...that...women are looking to find the husband. That part, I think it is very true to life, but the rest of the stories is not even close to life. It's kind of...um...what would you call it...like a parody, I guess.

I. OK. How do you feel about the mass media?

R. Oh, I have mixed feelings the media?

I. OK. Can you tell me about...them?

R. Um...I get...I get really upset. The one way, I feel...as I get very upset as how...um...they portray women, and...the whole fact that...so many women and young girls think like...they have to be thin. Um...that's the whole...media-

induced...problem. We shouldn't even have that problem. It's because the media that we have that problem, and...um...so in one respect, I really hate how they treat women on tv, but in the other respect, I like tv, because you can get so much across to so many people...so fast. It's an incredible medium...to spread information on. I hate it that sometimes they use to exploit...people, not just women. They...they just...right exploit people...on tv.

I. In what way that...you think that they exploit people...both men and women?

R. Because the way that they portray men and women...on tv and in the movies that...make the general population...believe that...that's they way they're supposed to be, and if they are not like that,...then...something's wrong with them, and...I...I want them to...show different kinds of people. Everybody on tv always look...perfect, and...people in the real world don't look perfect.

I. OK. What...are there any other aspects that the media portray the world besides people that look perfect?

R. Um...I...I don't know that...they...they portray people...the way they really are. Um...I'm not sure...can you word that question another way?

I. Oh, OK. Let's see. You said that the mass media portray men and women as perfect, do they portray the other aspects of the...men and women or life that are not real?

R. I think...they portray them as...much more *materialistic* than the way people really are.

I. Can you give me example?

R. Well, there is much more that happens in real life...that deal with people's feelings, and...on tv, they don't show people's feelings. They...they deal with events. The deal with...um...plot line, but they don't...they don't bring people's feeling...in to the stories. Sometimes I see something, and I think why did that person do that, and...no one has any idea why the person did that, because...it wasn't important to the story, and...that's the thing I don't like...that.... You know, there might be something that happens to somebody that is kind of boring..., but they don't put that on tv, but that's what happens to people in real life.

I. Yeah, OK. I will read this question to you...it is kind of confusing. Um..., "What is the image of 'good life' do you think being portrayed in the media?" "That is, according to what you see in the media, what do you think...would make a person happy and fulfilled?"

R. Um...OK, according to the media?

I. Yes.

R. I would say...a big house,...um...a lot of cars....

I. A lot of cars!?

R. Yeah, expensive...not just one car...many expensive cars,...um...nice clothes, and...um...um...what you call it...attention...like a lot of...attention or fame, I guess you can call that. That...that's what I see...the media...see as the good life.

I. OK. Would that...do you think...according to the media, if the person has that...would make them happy?

R. Yes.

I. OK. Do you think...through medium...that kind of presentation...that...um...you get this idea?
R. How do I get that impression?
I. Yeah...from what kind of program or from what kind of...?
R. Oh, commercial.
I. Commercial? Like tv...?
R. Yeah, and also from...magazine ads...magazine advertisements. Those are the two biggies, I think.
I. OK. Um...have you ever notice advertising for...credit cards?
R. Oh, I do a lot now. I've been...I've been since I have been in DA. I pay a lot more attention, and I know that...that seems to be...around a lot.
I. Yeah. You mean...like in tv and magazines?
R. I see more in tv, and I get...um.... I don't notice much in magazines, but I get a lot of things in the mail, you know, like I guess mass mailing.
I. Oh, you mean pre-approved cards...that kind of thing?
R. Exactly.
I. Oh, OK.
R. I get a lot of that, and I notice that...I notice the commercial. Commercials make you feel..., or this is what I get from them...is that...you will...be...you will be very happy if you bought...buy these things with our card. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) OK. Can you give me any specific example?
R. Um...that...that Master Card One, where it said, you know, something is ten dollars, something else is twenty dollars, and this is priceless, that one...even though the message there...at first when I first saw it, I thought, "Oh, they're saying that money can buy these things that will make you happy," but they are not. They are saying that, "You can have these stuffs and be happy, but you will be even happier if you buy these things," and use their credit card. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) But I think...I think that's great advertising. I don't know how they....
R. Well, yeah. Technically that's what an ad is supposed to do, and I think it is doing its job. It put a lot of people in debt. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.)
R. Because it is working. (Laugh.)
I. (Laugh.) OK. Now, do you think that because the advertising and the media that they portray these things (what make a person happy) you told me, do you think that those things have any influence on your life at all?
R. Um...I think...it used to, but I think now I'm very aware of it, and I watch, and I don't...um...I don't believe it like I used to.
I. OK. Can you recall how you believe it? I mean how it was like the way that you used to believe it?
R. Oh, the way that I used to believe it?
I. Yes.
R. Um...I used to feel like I was missing out on something if I didn't buy the things that they would say to buy in the commercials. There was something missing...in my life, and I really wasn't...happy, even if I thought I was,...um...because I didn't

have these things, and I started...feeling like I was missing out...of having a happy life.

I. OK. Now, is that...do you...does watching the tv programs...I mean not the tv commercials, you know, like...all the tv drama or something like that...?

R. Um...sometimes, I think, yeah. I got it...personally, I got it more from...the commercials, but I think I also got it from the tv commer.... Well, actually, no. Come to think of it, it was more like fifty-fifty, because a lot of the tv shows...um...that I used to watch...that I like at a time, they would portray...this is the way life is, and I.... Since my life wasn't like that, and I felt like...that I was the one...that didn't belong, and that...everybody else has all these things, and have this kind of life, and I was the only one that didn't.

I. You mean...everybody in reality...did you believe they have that kind of life?

R. I used to, yeah.

I. Really!?

R. Yeah. Well, see I grew up very poor, and so...as I was growing up, I believe that everybody...a lot of people have more than I did, (laugh) and it was a fact, you know, and so...as I got older, I thought...I just kept...perpetuating the same thing, "Oh, it must still be that way." I was still not having.... I was still trying to catch up...kind of catch up with the rest of the world.

I. And now that you really don't do that...anymore?

R. No. I think it is interesting. I think it was because I met some...very wealthy people...who are really miserable, and...it shows me...that, "You know what, they are not any happier just because they have all these things," and it actually took me to see people in real life...like when I was working as an administrative assistant. I met these presidents, vice-presidents, and chairman of the board...all that...um..., they're VERY unhappy. They're very unhappy people, and they've got...more money than I'll ever see...in my life, (laugh) you know, and that...that shows me...you know...it doesn't matter what you have.

I. OK. Now, do you think that the mass media...used to or have any influence on your shopping habits?

R. It did...a lot.

I. OK.

R. Because I was like...I would see a commercial, and I would want to go out. I was actually very...um...I was probably in advertisers' dream, (laugh) because I would see a commercial and I would want to run out and go get it, and there were a couple of time when they have this commercial...call now, I called. (Laugh.) There were people that said, "Call now," and I called, and I ordered something...like...most of the time, it was like a videotape...for something. Like I see movie on tv, and they say you can order this by..."To order this videotape, call now," and I would call and charge, and get a copy, when all I have to do is tape it...on tv, but I wanted it like...good one.

I. Oh, without the advertising?

R. Yeah...yeah. I wanted a good copy, and it would have been.... There was something...um...not as important about...my copy as...I copy it off the tv.

I. Oh, is it!

R. Yeah. I...I thought...theirs is better. Theirs is like...the real one, and mine is like...a second-handed one.
I. OK. Does that have anything to do with the quality of the video?
R. NO...no, I don't think so, because...when I taped it off the tv, it was just as good as what they sent me. It has the commercials in it, you know, but...um...that...that's basically the only difference, but in my mind, I thought it was better...to get it from them. It...it is like an official...copy.
I. OK. Is that the same way you shop for something else...like you look for something that is...you know,...let's say...legitimate?
R. Yeah. And I think...part of that was...because when I was growing up...because we were poor, I got a lot...I got my cousin's clothes all the time. I never got to go out and buy clothes, or if we did, we get stuffs on sale or stuffs like that, so that when I got older...um...when I wanted to buy something...nice, I wanted to get the nicest thing. I didn't want to get...something.... There was something about getting.... Even though I would get things on sale a lot of time, and this was...a self-esteem thing, I would buy thing on sale all the time,...thinking I didn't deserve to get the thing...at its real price.
I. Really!?
R. Yeah. I would wait for things to go on sale, and I look back, I didn't realize it then, but I look back now, I know it's self-esteem thing. I didn't think I deserved to get it...full price. I only deserve it if it was on sale.
I. OK.
R. Does that make sense?
I. Yes, it does.
R. (Laugh.) OK.
I. (Laugh.) I think a lot of people have the same thing. You know, I would wait for the same thing. I got to wait for the sale too. Yes, I do. (Laugh.)
R. And I actually are much better at believe a lot of the time—not all the time, but most of the time now that I do deserve to get. I do deserve things, and...and that's kind of nice. I like that feeling.
I. And...how long do you have that feeling...since DA or...?
R. Um...I only have a year and a half.
I. OK. So, what do you do when...you see advertising, either on tv or in the magazines? Do you avoid or what do you do with them?
R. Um...no, I look at them...um..., but I look at them...I look at it differently now. I look at it as if it's something...that.... If it's in a book, I just kind of look at it, "Oh, that's nice," or if it is something I need, I...just..., "Oh, let's think about it." I don't do impulse buying anymore. Before..., but I think about it...before I buy anything. I make sure, and I...I shop around. I make sure that that's the one I want, and I...I do not...just buy something on the spirit of the moment...anymore, and I...like that a lot, and I think because...I've gotten into that habit, I don't...I don't look at advertising that way either. Sometimes I see something nice and I might save that page or in the future I might buy that, but I don't have this urge...to like, "Oh, my God, I've got to go get that," like I used to. I used to, yes, I used to have that urge.

I. OK. How about like on the tv...like when it comes on, do you change the channel or do anything?

R. No.... A lot of time, I end up taping things because I'm not home very much. I just...(laugh)...fast forward.

I. Oh, OK. (Laugh.) OK. Do you get a lot of catalog?

R. I get a lot of catalogs?

I. OK. What do you do when you get the catalog?

R. Um...that's interesting. I get these catalogs and I always look through them, and sometimes I bend the pages if there is something that I like,...um...and then I put the catalog. I have this basket, and then I put the catalog in this basket. If I haven't bought it...anything out of that catalog in about six months, then I throw it away, and most of the time.... In fact, so rarely...I never buy things out of catalogs anymore like I used to. Once in a while, I buy a present. It can't be too expensive, because I actually...I used my spending plan now. I've been very careful...to have a spending plan, and...see, before...it didn't matter how much it costs, I just buy it? (Laugh.)

I. OK. (Laugh.)

R. I mean...it couldn't be outrageous. I did have certain limit. You know, I wouldn't spend a thousand dollars on something, but...um...I would buy presents for people...like, you know, that are fifty dollars or a hundred dollars, when I didn't have that, and I would go, and...and...buy them anyway, and...um...just kept...I just kept charging.

I. OK. Um...how do you feel about advertising?

R. Um...I have mixed feelings. I...I kind of like it, because we have a democracy and we all need to need to know if we want to go out shopping. We have the freedom to buy things. We don't just have one kind of toothpaste, you know, or one kind of soap. I mean...you can go out, and you have a choice, which is.... I like that, the whole concept...of that, but one the other hand,...um...it's like why we're wasting all these money...to have thirty-five kinds of toothpaste. (Laugh.) We don't NEED thirty-five kinds of toothpaste. I think of this just as an example, because I just bought toothpaste today. I was standing there in isle looking. There's like whole isle...for toothpaste. (Laugh.) This is like...this is ridiculous. These brands are all basically the same thing, and the thing that I don't like about advertising is it...makes everything...costs more, because they put the amount of money that they spend on advertising to that product, and they get the money back. We are the one that are paying for it, and that's when it gets to me. I hate that, and it's like...yeah, to have a democracy...you kind of have to have it that way, so...I'm very torn, and that's probably not a very...straight answer for you, but I'm not quite sure how to say it, but...that.... It bothers me, and yet, at the same time, it doesn't bother me.

I. OK. Um...is that...is there anything about advertising that concerns you?

R. Um...yes. I don't like how...they manipulate children. Um...I don't like that, because children are...too innocent. I mean adults after awhile...you can look at commercials and you can see what they try to do. You can see that, "Yeah, you try to get me to buy that," but kids don't know that, and...um...well, some adults

don't,...(laugh)...um...and...and I don't...I don't like...um...I don't like advertising for children.

I. OK. I will read this question to you, alright?

R. OK.

I. Is there anything about the image portrayed in the advertising that concern you?

R. ???

I. I mean...the image part of it that...um...that concerns you?

R. Um...yeah. The one thing that concerns me is the image of women, and how you have to be...skinny,...um...and...how that.... I don't think that's a healthy...image for...um...young girls growing up to see, and that's all they see. That's what I saw when I was growing up, and...and I don't like that.

I. OK. Do you think advertising has any...influence on your life?

R. Oh, yeah, I do.... Um...whether I want to or not,...it does.

I. OK. Can you...can you explain that or...?

R. Um...it's...it's a part of our culture. So much so that sometimes...um...when I'm watching thing, I don't even realize what it's doing until later on, and I WATCH thing a lot, you know… and...um...I forgot the question. (Laugh.)

I. OK. (Laugh.) Yeah.

R. I lost my thought. I forgot your question.

I. I just said, "Does advertising have any influence on your life," and so far you said, "Yes."

R. Oh, yeah...um…I can't.... It's impossible...to not to have a commercial affect you. It is hard not to have advertising in the magazine...affects me. I mean I try and watch, try to be careful...to see what it is I'm seeing, and...since I know my own...compulsion...um..., I'm more careful now to watch..., and make sure that..., "Okay, am I doing this because I really need this...I really like it, or because...I really just want to buy this it's telling me that it's gonna make me feel better," you know, and I...I really have to watch that a lot now, whereas before I didn't.

PARTICIPANT QUALIFICATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Participant Qualification Questionnaire is adapted from Faber and O'Guinn's (1992) Clinical Screener for Compulsive Buying.

Scoring equation = -9.69 + (Q1a x .33) + (Q2a x .34) + (Q2b x .50) + (Q2c x .47) + (Q2d x .33) + (Q2e x .38) + (Q2f x .31).

If score is equal to or less than –1.34, subject is classified as a compulsive buyer.

1. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. Circle the number which best indicates your answer.

a. If I have any money left at the end of the pay period, I just have to spend it.

Strongly agree	*Somewhat agree*	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Somewhat disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

2. Please indicate how often you have done each of the following things. Circle the number which best indicates your answer.

a. Felt others would be horrified if they knew of my spending habits.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

b. Bought things even though I couldn't afford them.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

c. Wrote a check when I knew I didn't have enough money in the bank to cover it.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

d. Bought myself something in order to make myself feel better.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

e. Felt anxious or nervous on days I didn't go shopping.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

f. Made only the minimum payments on my credit cards.

Very often	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*
__(1)__	__(2)__	__(3)__	__(4)__	__(5)__

VITA

Saovanee Tesgim was born in Thailand in 1967. In 1988 she entered Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, where she majored in English. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts in 1992, she immigrated to the United States. In 1994, she entered the Murray State University, Kentucky, where she received a Master of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communications in 1996. From there, she was admitted to the Doctoral program in Communication at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While she was in the Doctoral program, she took a two-year leave of absence and was employed as an instructor at the Department of English, College of Arts and Sciences, Christian University, Thailand. In 2003, she came back to the United States to complete her dissertation. The doctoral degree was received in August, 2004.

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