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IN-DEPTH NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

Subject: Obsession vs Addiction
Omaha Westside

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Addiction versus Obsession



Seeing the Difference

Dear Readers,

Addiction is a prevalent topic in society today. It is an issue that affects adults as well as teenagers. Often students claim, “I’m so addicted to [insert noun here].” How often are these statements really true? Although addictions claim the lives of many, some cannot be classified as true dependencies that cause psychological and physiological symptoms. The Lance In-Depth section decided to take an investigative look on the differences between addictions and obsessions to learn more about what can become fixations in students’ lives. We also took a look at addictions that are not typically discussed. By no means are we claiming the following students to be addicted or obsessed. Their stories are pertinent to the topic at hand, and are beneficial to inform the community. We hope this special report will give students, staff and community members alike better insight regarding the fine line between addiction and obsession.

Sincerely,

Jenny Shehan, Editor-in-chief
Cara Wilwerding, Editor-in-chief



Photo Illustration By
Lindsay Lee

Addiction / Obsession

According to Webster’s Dictionary, **addiction** is defined as the **compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance**. It is characterized by the experience of physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. These include sweating, tremors, vomiting, anxiety, insomnia and muscle pains.

There are physiological and psychological addictions. Physiological addictions occur when an individual’s body becomes dependent on a substance. Dependency on drugs, alcohol, tobacco and caffeine can be classified as a physiological addiction.

Psychological addictions occur when an individual craves a desire or behavior in order to decrease anxiety and stress. Gambling, sex and pornography, eating and shopping are all examples of this form of addiction.

–2.2 million Americans are currently affected with obsessive compulsive disorder.

–14 million Americans are currently experiencing alcohol use disorders.*

–Over 22 million individuals have a substance abuse problem in the U.S.

–Heroin addicts spend as much as \$200 per day to maintain their addiction.

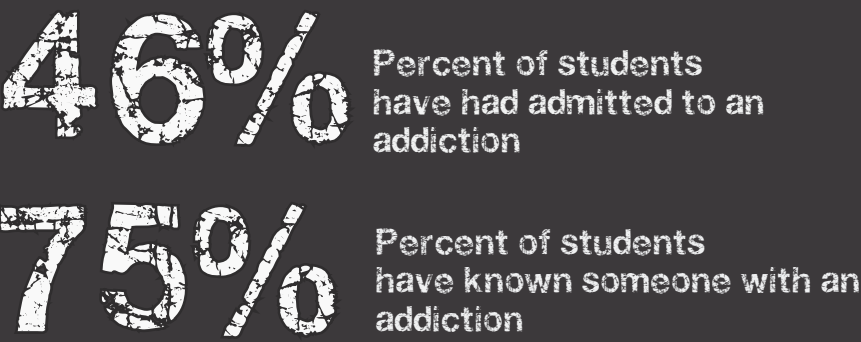
–Over 6% of the U.S. population is afflicted with a shopping addiction.

Obsession is defined as **a persistent, disturbing, preoccupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling**. Obsessions often stem from the individual’s need for control, either over themselves or over others. Some obsessions are the result of psychological conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

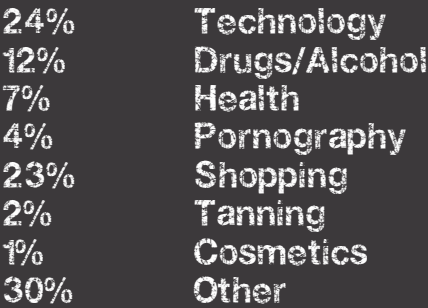
Common obsessions include concern with dirt or germs, fear of becoming ill, preoccupation with eating habits or need for symmetry and order.

*Information supported by WebMD & The National Institute of Mental Health.

According to a survey of 108 students at random:



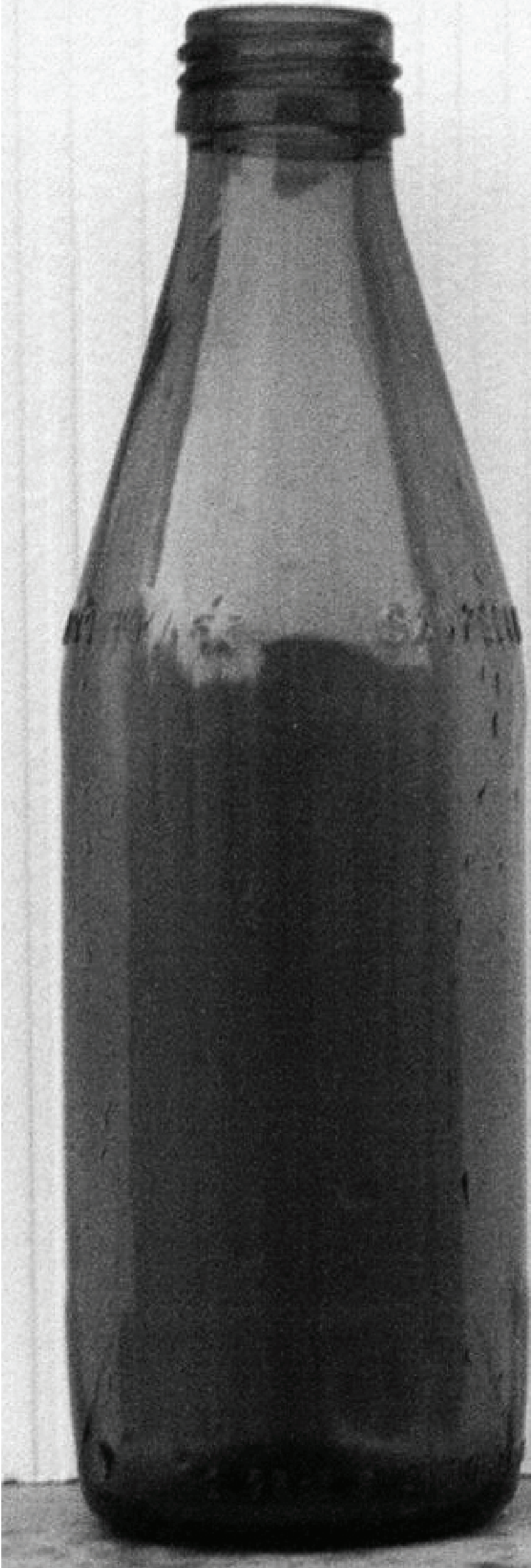
Surveyed students confess to addictions in the following areas:



November 2009

Parental addiction

Alcohol dominates decisions, lives



Cara Wilwerding
Editor-in-chief

“I wake up and usually don’t see my mom in the morning. She usually doesn’t get home until seven and by then we don’t really know where she’s been, but I can already tell that she’s been drinking,” *senior Emily Walker** said. “When I’m trying to do my homework she wants to talk about other things. I try to go to bed by 10 so I don’t have to deal with her.”

Walker is the child of a mother who is both alcoholic and bipolar. In addition, her father has been diagnosed with clinical depression. Although she did not recognize the alcohol abuse until age 10, it is evident now. Her mother, who often goes through a bottle of wine per day, is abusive in a way that often goes unrecognized.

“She’s knocked me around a couple times but it’s more verbal,” Walker said. “She just says stuff that cuts you to the bone. Just about how horrible you are and how much you’ve disappointed her and failed her. How you don’t live up to her expectations, but her expectations change everyday. My dad used to stand up for me a lot but anymore if she’s yelling at me or mad at me, it’s my turn.”

According to the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, over 28 million children in the United States suffer the consequences of a parental addiction. These addictions not only affect the alcohol or drug user, but also have a tremendous impact on their children. A typical day for any of these children may be tranquil and quiet or it may be a war zone.

Counselor Carla Beardmore-Harding reports that one out of every four young people is touched by alcoholism or drug addiction. Varying problems such as eating disorders, attention deficit disorder, depression, anxiety and relationship issues are often results of the living situation.

“Children of alcoholics learn three rules, either in an overt or covert way,” Beardmore-Harding said. “Don’t talk, don’t touch, don’t feel. With any of the kids that come in to talk with me, I teach them how uniform that mandate is and that it is very important that if they want to heal themselves, you have to do three things — break the three rules.”

Walker’s mother has never been to rehabilitation, but has talked to the family doctor about her drinking problem and her liver. The condition may be difficult to discuss with mere acquaintances, however Walker finds solace in speaking with close relatives.

“My grandparents on both sides are aware. They both think she needs medical attention but they don’t say anything because they’re scared she will freak out on them too,” Walker said. “Her dad is a recovering alcoholic so it’s in her genes and her family. She has to realize it herself before anything can be done. I think she realizes it, but

she’s just in denial. She knows she drinks a lot but she’s like, ‘well, everybody drinks.’ She doesn’t realize that she changes into a different person.”

Walker also has a 14-year-old brother who is forced to deal with the same problem. According to Walker, he seems to be in a completely different situation due to his mother’s feelings towards him.

“My brother is her favorite so she’s really loving to him. He’s really quiet; I think that’s how he gets along with my mom so well. If he does something it’s okay,” Walker said. “Me and my dad are the people that she goes to take things out on.”

Due to her mother’s negative impact, Walker has developed a form of depression similar to her father’s. Although she has tried to forgive and forget, she may never feel the same about her mother as before.

“My dad and I are both on medication for depression from her. She knows that she is the main cause but doesn’t want to think she’s doing it to her own family. She’s scared to get help,” Walker said. “I just don’t trust her anymore and I can’t look at her the same. She always talks about how she wants to be my friend and misses how I was when I was little. All the memories are negative and it’s not really my mom — it’s just a person in our house.”

Although it is a touchy subject, addiction is not something to be taken lightly. There is a strong correlation between parental and adolescent addiction. As stated in *Addictive Behaviors*, “Generally, if parents take drugs, sooner or later, their children will also.”

“Addiction is a phenomenon that’s very complex. It’s a very prevalent problem,” Beardmore-Harding said. “For children who have someone close to them with an alcohol or drug problem, it’s important that they get help so they don’t have the same life problems.”

After seeing the problems it can cause, Walker warns children of addiction to avoid alcohol at all costs.

“If people have alcoholism in their family, you should look at how they are because addictions can start really early,” Walker said. “I personally don’t drink that much because I see what it can do to people. [My mom] started drinking when she was in high school. I don’t want to be the mom that she is. The couple times that I have drank, people say that I change into a different person.”

Coping with a detrimental situation for years, she also has advice for anyone who has an alcoholic family member.

“Learn from the beginning that it’s the alcohol talking, not your parent. Right now, I’m thinking it’s my mom saying this, not the other way around,” Walker said. “Talk about it. Eventually it will build up and you will go out on yourself because your parent says you’re the problem.”

**The name has been changed at source’s request.*

Photo Illustration by
Lindsay Lee

RISK FOR PERFECT SCORE

Psycho-stimulant abuse increases among youth, causes health concerns

Mary Susman
Managing Editor

Teenagers today are pushed to the limit as they juggle grades, jobs, extracurricular activities and, on top of that, social lives. Competition is a living beast, pulling under those who don't stack up and threatening each student who dreams of taking a break.

With such a draining pressure weighing heavily on today's youth, an increasing number of students are turning to prescription drugs in their time of need.

As awareness is raised of this increasingly common drug abuse, parents and schools are coming to face a harsh reality.

"It's just been in the past two years that I've been aware — students have actually talked with me — about the fact that they are taking non-prescribed stimulant drugs prior to tests," drug and alcohol counselor Carla Beardmore-Harding said.

The appeal of taking stimulants to teens is the effect the drugs have on their bodies, particularly during times they need to focus. The prescription drugs, most often Ritalin and Adderall, are prescribed to people who have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In the same category as cocaine, methamphetamine and nicotine, these drugs are psycho-stimulant drugs, or amphetamines.

"What that means is that when given to a normal person, it speeds up the body," Beardmore-Harding said. "It makes a person's motor reactions much more quick; it throws a person into a sort of amped up, sped up mode. What we know is that for people who have ADD and ADHD, and legitimately have that disorder, [the drugs] have what's called a paradoxical effect."

For these patients with ADD or ADHD, the drugs help them slow down and focus.

Nina Kampe is a parent of eight children ranging from a high school graduate to a preschooler. One of her daughters, a kindergartner, is easily distracted and lacks impulse control. Since

their family physician tested her for ADHD and prescribed Adderall, Kampe has seen first-hand the difference the drug can make when appropriately prescribed.

"She has the hyperactivity and the inattention," Kampe said. "Two weeks into school we got her on medication and her teachers have already said they've seen a big difference."

While the prescribed drugs benefit people with ADD or ADHD, they also cause people without the disorders to focus better. As more people have become aware of this effect, students without prescriptions have taken the drugs, hoping to focus better on academic work. Students have taken these stimulants especially around test times for the ACT and SAT, hoping to advance their performance.

Beardmore-Harding has worked with students who have taken non-prescribed prescription drugs for this purpose. One high-achieving student she knew was unhappy after receiving a score of 25 on the ACT. Months later, he saw Beardmore-Harding and announced his score improved by about four points. His mom had given him Adderall before the test.

"That says so many things to this boy. It says you're not good enough on your own. You need a quick fix; you need to amp yourself up in order to be pleasing to your parents, society, the world," Beardmore-Harding said. "It taught him to cheat, because he is not going to be able to work at that level consistently unless he begins taking this drug regularly, and he will become addicted to it."

People who take these drugs can easily become addicted to them, especially if there is a family history with addiction.

"Anybody who has a parent who drinks too much or is a pill-popper is really foolish to mess around with the use of stimulant drugs or any

mood altering drug because they're at heightened risk for addiction," Beardmore-Harding said. "And you don't have to be addicted to have negative consequences. You could be dead from it if you have an underlying health problem and your body is not one that is supposed to have psycho-stimulants, or you can be somebody who takes them a few times and has no problems, and then the next time you use it, you're dead."

Beardmore-Harding acknowledges the severity of this drug abuse among teens; there are life-threatening consequences for people who take these drugs without a prescription.

"This is an issue here," Beardmore-Harding said. "It's an issue of concern for health reasons because the young people don't realize that a proper prescription will be written after the physician rules out any preexisting heart conditions or vascular problems, and the reason that's so important is because of the way the drugs work in the human body. They're going to work, in many ways, differently in a person who has ADD and a person who does not have that disorder."

Before starting medication for ADHD, Kampe's daughter underwent an electrocardiogram test that measures the heart's electrical activity. This confirmed her health and allowed her to begin medication.

It's the time of year when students stress over grades and test scores, especially seniors fighting for acceptance at their dream colleges. Although society feeds off competition, Beardmore-Harding assures students psycho-stimulant drugs are not the solution. Beardmore-Harding serves as a Westside resource for any student with concerns.

"You don't have to be addicted to have medical consequences; you could be dead," Beardmore-Harding said.

“You don’t have to be addicted to have medical consequences; you could be dead.”

Carla Beardmore-Harding

Photo Illustration by
Lindsay Lee

OVERLOAD

Technological advances provide outlet for modern-day dependences

Emma May
Staff Writer

“At this time we ask that you turn off all cell phones and battery operated devices.”

The simple request from the flight attendant, complying with federal safety regulations, caused an uproar in row 24-seat B.

“Mom,” the child of almost four years wailed. “Why do I have to turn my game off? MAMA! I am playing now and I am not going to turn it off.”

The incessant crying continued while the mother tried to calm the tears and subside the annoyance of the surrounding passengers.

“A game?” passenger 25 A muttered with a quizzical glance. “The kid is crying over a game?”

A study done by a researcher from Iowa State University found that of youth ages 8-18 who play video games, 8.5% exhibit multiple characteristics of addiction.

But how does one know it’s an addiction?

As stated by the National Institute on Media and the Family, “When time spent on the computer playing video games or cruising the internet reaches a point that it harms a child’s or adult’s family and social relationships or disrupts school or work life that person may be caught in a cycle of addiction.”

Similar addictions can also be attributed to older generations according to a Games Segmentation survey report. Known as ‘extreme gamers’ these vital components of the video game industry spend an average of 45 hours a week playing games, the same amount an average full-time worker spends in the office. Although it is estimated they make up only 3% of the nations gamers, they contribute \$5 billion to the market each quarter.

“I don’t think gaming is a physical addiction, but I would say it can be a mental one,” junior Regan Kessler said. “Some people dig their games so much that they want to go play them instead of doing the things they need to get done, and in that case it can be considered an addiction.”

One argument from game enthusiasts is that games provide a fun and reliable learning method. The past 10 years has seen a significant increase in educational games, such as Math Evolver and Brainiversity for computers.

“I can personally say that games have helped me,” senior Scott Klusaw said. “When I came to the school as a freshman I was in basic classes, but now I am in AP classes, Calculus BC, AP Chemistry. It sounds weird to say playing video games has made me a smarter person, but it’s true.”

Some of the attributes of game addiction, including spending most free time on video games, social seclusion and feelings of withdrawal can also be credited to television addiction.

“I think that television addiction is definitely real,” junior Anne Sundell said. “A side effect I have is that when I miss shows because I have homework or sports, I end up watching like 12 hours at once to catch up. The Internet fuels television addiction; I found out that Hulu was blocked today and my world was shattered.”

Although only 10 years older than the computer, television’s impact on the modern world is unsurpassed. Television challenges video games for the attention of addicts with more than 2,218 broadcast stations nation wide

in 2006 according to The World Factbook.

The United States tied with the United Kingdom for the country with the highest weekly television consumption, at 28 hours per person every week, and the rates are rising. In 1975, 57% of U.S. households had one television and less than 11% had more than 3, but by 2008 over 50% of American homes had at least 3 televisions while only 19% had one.

As the technology progresses, the new inventions make addiction to television and gaming even easier.

When the first remote control for the television was invented in the 1950’s it was nicknamed “Lazy Bones,” mirroring the initial distaste for the devices. The remotes grew in popularity, however, and people became dependent on them. Soon there were remotes invented for a plethora of other items, and an emphasis on technology as a luxury became more common. Today they are used for a variety of advanced television functions, including the ability to order films directly to your screen, no trip to Blockbuster necessary. It is rare to see someone getting up to place a cassette tape in the VCR to record their favorite show; they have TiVo for that.

With the introduction of a device that allowed viewers to rewind live television, record shows and fast-forward through commercials, television was revolutionized once again by TiVo and viewer rates were rising.

Soon celebrities such as Rosie O’ Donnell were singing the device’s praises saying, “TiVo is the most amazing thing ever invented,” and America listened. According to TiVo a survey of subscribers found 98% of them “couldn’t live without” their TiVo and another 40% said they would sooner disconnect their cell phone than unplug their TiVo.

“TiVo has changed my life more than children,” documentary filmmaker Pete Jones said. “It’s the only thing in my life that I can count on week after week.”

Missed television shows can even be watched outside of the living room. Multiple websites, such as Hulu, are dedicated to providing people with an easily accessible venue to watch numerous past shows.

Computer and television addictions work hand in hand.

Technology seems to offer some new solution every day, yet the repercussions of having to do so little physically and remaining entranced in front of an LED screen for hours on end is taking a major toll on the health of Americans. Obesity rates are rising, younger generations are observing, and perhaps acting on, explicit and violent behavior and the nuclear family unit is experiencing weakened bonds. According to the leading media research company A.C. Nielson, when asked if they would prefer spending time with their fathers or watching television, 54% of four to six-year-olds chose television.

American children are being raised with technologies more advanced than ever before, and if this trend continues to increase perhaps one day there will be planes full of 24 Bs.



Graphic By
Emily Nachun

TOO MANY FRIENDS

Social networking websites waste time, take away from face-to-face communication skills

Grace Lyden
Copy Editor

Senior Lauren Bradford is not abnormal. She plays sports, does her homework and enjoys spending time with friends: 1,400 of them.

Think it might be a challenge to keep up with so many? Not with Facebook.

With over 900 tagged photos, Bradford has been a part of the social networking website since eighth grade, when it was created. She posts her own pictures every two weeks and now gets notifications sent to her cell phone via the Facebook Text application. This is in addition to the time spent on her home computer’s unfiltered Internet.

“I check it all the time. I check it after school, maybe three times per day,” senior Lauren Bradford said.

Bradford’s behaviors might have been considered wasteful and frivolous 10 years ago; however, they are now widely accepted among youth. Checking three times a day and getting text notifications is normal for teens.

“Everyone likes Facebook,” Bradford said, as she expressed her love of the website. But while a devotee, she is happy administrators have blocked it at school, where “everyone would be on all the time.”

Internet-based social addiction is no longer metaphorical. In July 2009, the first residential treatment center for Internet addiction in the United States opened

its doors to the Seattle public.

“For \$14,000... the center, called ReSTART... offers a 45-day program intended to help people wean themselves from pathological computer use,” according to Nicholas K. Geranios of the Associated Press (miamiherald.com).

The unhealthy habits are most prevalent in teens. “I believe that it is genetically built into the adolescent to communicate with their peers,” said Paul Lindgren, head of Tech Support.

Though Lindgren and his coworkers can block Facebook at school, the internal e-mail system, FirstClass, is an alternative method of web communication during the school day, and it can be just as “addictive.”

Sophomore Austin Brady spends six hours or more on FirstClass after school most days, though much of his time online is not spent e-mailing: the application is merely open. His e-mail habits have diminished since last year, when he would have spent several weeks on FirstClass by the third week of September, as opposed to his week and three days this year.

For an AP Statistics proficiency, sophomore Aaron Calderon took 100 samples of time spent on FirstClass by the third week of September. His maximum was about a week and four days, though Austin claims friends of his can top that.

Similar to Bradford’s descriptions of a “Facebook withdrawal” when she has no Internet access, Brady’s

Internet-less experiences at Great Wolf Lodge the weekend of Sept. 19-20 were a struggle.

“We [he and his friend] were going pretty much insane,” Brady said. “We actually got Internet for a brief period... and we e-mailed all we could during that time.”

When Brady has no Internet difficulties it is especially challenging to log off.

“I get on, I talk to friends and it’s just so much fun. [Then] I get off and... feel empty,” Brady said. “I start thinking, ‘What if that person e-mailed me back? What if they read my e-mail?’ so I have to get online and check.”

Brady spends more time on Facebook in the summer because it is cumbersome to get on his home computer during the school year, but this has not decreased his socialization, thanks to FirstClass.

Lindgren, however, insists the internal e-mail system, even if addictive, is necessary so that administrators have control over e-mailing. What is more, he says, there is no way to fully prevent teen communication.

“It’s like a river,” Lindgren said. “You block it here, it’s going to go somewhere else. Kids just want to communicate — people in general want to.”

Both Bradford and Brady view the prevalence of web-based socialization as a major improvement in communication since their parents’ high school years.

Story Continued Page 7

ONIOMANIA

Consumer buying patterns feed into serious addiction — shopping

Mary Hepburn
Managing Editor

Senior Kara Duffy has eight pairs of Uggs. She doesn't know how many North Face jackets she owns. Her friend senior Claire Pedersen, alleges she has seven Juicy Couture track suits. Duffy denies the allegations, pushes in her dresser drawer discreetly.

Her chest of drawers is covered in Juicy Couture jewelry boxes, is spilling out with t-shirts, jeans and pants. Her closet is dress after dress after dress — 47, to be exact.

"I've known Kara since I was in seventh grade," said Claire Pedersen. "I would always go into her closet and she would have the newest Hollister jacket, the nicest Abercrombie jeans."

Since middle school, Duffy has made it a point to have the newest and best of everything. Her buying desires usually tend toward the aesthetics, such as clothes and shoes.

It is possible Duffy suffers from compulsive shopping disorder.

CSD, an impulse control disorder on par with hoarding and kleptomania, is a problem that has contributed to one of the most severe economic recessions in American history. With soaring numbers of CSD, many Americans are finding themselves trapped in a vicious circle of buying dependency and debt.

Often disregarded by the public as being harmless, and actually encouraged by current day consumerism, recorded numbers of oniomania, or shopping addiction, have skyrocketed in the past decade.

Psychiatrists point to an increase in advertising and emphasis on material items as indicators of social status as part of the problem. As compulsive buying patterns continue on the upswing, Americans are being driven further into debt. And to deal with the stress of it all, they are turning to their credit cards.

"I'm sad to say, but I do feel like it's a problem; I honestly do," Duffy said. Looking around her room, Duffy is surrounded by hampers of handbags, shoes and more clothes. "They kind of consume my space."

Many compulsive buyers are aware their behavior is not healthy, but, as a socially acceptable addiction, there is less incentive to change. But while the severity of the problem is not fully recognized, compulsive buying can result in massive debt and broken families. Often compulsive buying feeds into deeper psychological issues, such as low self-esteem.

Key signs of shopping addiction include using buying as a way to cope with anything from feelings of loneliness or depression, a fight with a loved one, or even stress from regular tasks like work or school.

"If I'm in a bad mood, I'll go shopping," Duffy said. "My mom even tells me when I'm in a bad mood she'll take me to look at clothes."

The one characteristic that most clearly identifies compulsive shopping from regular buying habits is a loss of control. Compulsive shoppers often feel guilty about their purchases and end up in a cycle of buying and returning items.

"I'm one of those people where I just buy something and then I realize, 'Wait, I shouldn't have bought that.' I'm an impulse buyer," Duffy said.

Compulsive shoppers typically buy things immediately and upon sight rather than leaving and coming back to see if the item still has its appeal. Immediate gratification is a key component.

For shopping addicts, a dependency on the dopamine released when buying often develops. Dopamine, a feel-good chemical naturally produced in the brain, is also the basis of much drug addiction. In some cases, psychiatrists deem medication necessary to treat the dependency. Prozac has been known to treat oniomania, but recent research has been dedicated to developing medication more specific to the disorder.

Perhaps the most frightening thing about compulsive buying disorder is the growing rates of people affected by it. According to the American Journal of Psychiatry, it is estimated that anywhere from 1.8% to 16% of the adult U.S. population fit the criteria, and the numbers are rising every year. With American values becoming more and more material-based, oniomania is becoming a national epidemic.

It is important to note that a person can exhibit symptoms of the disorder without actually having it. In fact, consumerist societies nearly always have high rates of compulsive buying. The disorder, however, is characterized by a marked addiction to such habits.

It's hard to say whether Duffy herself is afflicted with compulsive buying disorder or whether she simply exhibits symptoms, as many Americans do. Drawing the line can be a difficult task, accounting for much of the gap in available statistics.

However, one thing is certain. For compulsive buyers, buying is a temporary way to relieve anxiety. Unfortunately, the coping mechanism often backfires, resulting in mounting stress. For sufferers of CSD it can seem like the only way to deal with problems.

"I'll put it this way. You do what you do to make yourself happy. Shopping makes me happy," Duffy said.

Graphic by
Emily Nachun

Social Networking

Continued from page 6

"Teens are really social," Bradford said. "When you're done with school and you have spare time, you want to keep socializing with people, so you can do that through Facebook by adding pictures and commenting, Facebook chatting and writing on people's walls."

Brady feels the same way about FirstClass; however, the two students agree personal social skills should be kept intact amidst the Internet relations.

"Face-to-face is a lot more personal. You can tell things to people over e-mail and Facebook, but it's not going to have the same emotion as if you tell them when you're with them or even on the phone," Brady said.

Despite this understanding, most will admit technol-

ogy has already taken away from face-to-face communication.

"Instead of calling on the phone, people text," Bradford said. "I'm not saying people don't know how to talk to each other, but... it's made a change."

Bradford admits she can get caught up in Facebook for hours, and Brady knows he takes longer to do his homework because of FirstClass, but neither have any intent to stop socializing.

In six years of laptops, only four students have visited Tech Support requesting e-mail restriction, to enhance their work habits.

"They admit they have a problem and say, 'Would you restrict this for me?' because they're having a hard time,"

Lindgren said. "That's maturity — to realize that it is something that can suck you in."

Parents regularly call Tech Support and intervene when they think their children need additional incentives to use their laptops for more academic goals. Lindgren, however, believes students who realize on their own how to manage time are better off.

"I've always seen Westside High School as the place to make your mistakes," Lindgren said. "This environment provides a lot of freedom to make mistakes and to learn from your mistakes, [such as] not managing your time well and then suffering the consequences... It's better to do it here than when you're in college paying \$11,000 a year."

HEALTH FEVER

Fine line drawn between exemplifying obsession, being health conscious

Jenny Shehan
Editor-in-chief

The stench of sweat and effort permeates the air in the room. Glistening bodies, panting, bounce up and down among free weights, atop treadmills. Machines operate on overload, straining from overuse. Minutes passed, calories burnt, miles achieved.

Dependency on working out and being health conscious is a disorder in itself. Although it is infrequently discussed, exercise abuse can have catastrophic short and long-term physical effects. What some consider an extreme devotion to good health can in fact be an obsessive drive.

Senior Leigh Jensen is a member of the varsity swim team. She exercises about five to six days a week for two to three hours a day. She works out with the swim team and also runs on a weekly basis.

“Yeah, I’m addicted to working out,” Jensen said. “I work out pretty much every day, but I take one day off a week.”

Jensen makes frequent visits to the weight room, which is normally a flurry of activity. Students, teachers and other members of the community spend time utilizing this room to achieve maximum workouts. Student athletes and school-sponsored teams also make frequent visits to the weight room to prepare for their seasons. It seems as if some students make more visits to the weight room than others.

When can this seemingly beneficial addiction become harmful? According to Jack Raglin, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of kinesiology at Indiana University, exercise obsession is signaled by exercising when injured or sick, relying constantly on exercise and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when exercise levels are decreased or temporarily blocked.

Senior Patrick Grogan is one student athlete who relies on exercise for its benefits. As a member of the cross country and track teams, he often spends a portion of his evenings lifting weights and running.

“I have to get in some sort of exercise every day,” Grogan said. “Hey, it makes me feel good.”

The good feeling Grogan describes is considered the “endorphin rush” associated with exercising. Studies have shown the brain releases endorphins, which cause a natural high that is often referred to as a “runner’s high”. Some researchers believe exercise abusers become addicted to the natural endorphins the body produces. However, others say this is unlikely.

Both Jensen and Grogan related similar feelings regarding

missing a day of workout.

“I feel sloppy, I don’t feel very good about myself,” Jensen said. Regardless, it is important to take time during the week to rest the body.

“I try to work out, run or lift every day except for Sunday, which is my recovery day,” Grogan said. “This day is especially important while I am in track and cross country season so my body gets time to recover adequately.”

In her article “How much Exercise is Too Much”, Barbara Brehm, a professor of exercise and sport studies at Smith College, relates that the specific amount of minimal exercise is hard for most experts to agree on. However, most who exercise five to six days a week need at least one day to recover. This recovery must include plenty of rest and good nutrition.

Aside from exercise obsession, there is also an infatuation with being health conscious. Calorie counting, extreme dieting and supposed natural or organic eating can be both beneficial and detrimental. Being conscious of one’s eating habits can be helpful in maintaining positive well-being. Still, fads such as calorie counting and magic diet pills promise decreased belly fat and rapid weight loss that seem to cross the line. Is there a point when healthy eating becomes fanatical?

Senior Alexa Koch is mindful of what she puts into her body. Often eating organically labeled foods, she prefers food that is unaltered, meaning it has not been sprayed with pesticides or injected with hormones. Calorie counting is one fad Koch does not buy into.

“I don’t necessarily see being health conscious as obsessive,” Koch said. “If anything it’s maybe [being] more dedicated or passionate. I think counting calories and limiting food each day might be obsessive.”

Websites are available to help dieters track calories. Online databases offer calorie amounts and the nutrition labels of countless products, from an apple to a package of potato chips.

“I do not count calories. I think focusing on calories can throw you more off track,” Koch said. “I have friends who simply focus on this, and they’re eating things that have terrible nutritional value. Just because it is labeled reduced fat with less calories does not make a packaged bag of chips healthy. Likewise, zero calorie food items often have tons of gross chemical additives. These can be really bad for you.”

The fine line between being obsessive and being conscientious about one’s health is crossed by many, but for these students, working out and eating healthy is simply a beneficial way of life.



Photo by
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