

Online shopping can become dangerous habit

I recently cut myself off from online shopping.

I knew I had a problem after setting up notifications when my favorite boutique posted items online. I contacted my favorite stores asking for special promo codes. I realized it was time to stop when my bank account plummeted.

Shopping online isn't difficult. After all, "It takes a lot less effort to shop online: We can shop when we're tired, we can shop when we're emotional, and we can shop instantly," said Jessica Mai, "Your Money" intern at Business Insider.

Fortune.com reported in 2016 that consumers are buying more things online than in stores – 51 percent of their purchases, to be exact. With the ease of online shopping, it is easy to see why these statistics stand.

Often, all online shopping requires us to do is visit a website, click a button to add an item to our cart, and check out. When online retailers have our credit card and address information saved, the process is even simpler, making online shopping a half-dozen-click process, or even a one-click process as on Amazon.

I cut myself off after making two American Eagle purchases over the course of three days. Both orders totaled more than \$50. Despite attempts to save money, my impulse buys this school year outweighed my regular work study job income.

My mom has always been one of the most frugal people I know, and not in a bad way. She's taught me how to look for good deals, and how to notice the value of a dollar.

Since getting my first job at age 15, I have been responsible for more purchases than some people my age. Because I had to pay my parents back for my first car, I once had a jar for every extra penny, dime and dollar. Even my friends were giving me their change, simply saying "car fund" as they placed coins in my hand.

The focus on that loose change is one of the only reasons my car was ever paid off – a three-year

Personal Column

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process beginning my freshman year of high school and ending at graduation. The gratification of finally having the car paid off was – almost – worth every penny. Now, the back doors no longer open, but I'm determined to make my money last. I always tell people I'll drive it until it stops on the side of the road.

Living under the roof of my blue-collar parents proved to be a financial blessing. Before buying things, I mentally calculate how long it took me to make the money I'm about to spend, even counting in taxes. I'm not a math-minded person, but I am a frugal one.

Hearing this, it may be difficult to believe the struggles with online shopping. I wouldn't be honest with myself if I said I have always had this problem.

In reality, my online shopping addiction began when I came to Southwestern. I no longer had my mom to make comments about my spending, so I didn't think about the irresponsibility of my bank account dipping.

Though online shopping seems innocent enough, it can evolve into an addiction. Wesley Smothermon, therapist at Asbury Counseling Center in Wichita, said that a large part of addressing an addiction is understanding it.

"When working with addictions, for instance, shopping, I usually don't spend a whole lot of time on the issue with shopping as I explore reasons and motives behind it," said Smothermon. "This is important because, through my experience, working with those who struggle with addictions shows

that the problem is not what they "use" – shopping, sex, alcohol – but why. Shopping in itself is not wrong, but when used excessively at the point that it hurts those around them and themselves, that's when it becomes the problem."

Smothermon said that someone with a shopping addiction may struggle with self-esteem issues, and feel that the more things they buy and the better they look will make them feel more valuable. He said that the pressures of society can aid a shopping addiction.

"Our society does teach that how you look and what you buy can bring happiness," said Smothermon. "Our society influences each other the importance of looking good and feeling good.

"When understanding addic-



tions, the best place to start is learning what our society is trying to tell us," said Smothermon. "People are always trying to find the best new toy or wear the coolest looking clothes that are the trend because it makes them feel good and noticed."

Madi Adams, business administration sophomore, said that she hasn't shopped online much recently. Adams' favorite store to shop from is Lululemon. Adams said that she doesn't think online shopping is dangerous, because it offers opportunity for "retail therapy."

"I actually find better stuff online than I do in stores," said Adams. "So when I'm shopping online, I'm spending my money wisely."

Adams said that she is more likely to buy something if it is on sale, and that the best part of online shopping is finding good deals.

She said that the times she online shops depend on how much money she has and if she is trying to save money. She said she only regrets a purchase when something doesn't fit.

Smothermon said that addiction is a learned behavior, and helping someone with an addiction like shopping begins by addressing unresolved issues like low self-esteem.

"When helping those with addictions, specifically shopping, my goal is to help them discover what they really need in their life and how it can be satisfied in a way that is not hurting to others and themselves," said Smothermon.

Timothy J. Legg, PhD, with Healthline.com says that 18 million adults in the United States are affected by a shopping addiction.

"While many people enjoy shopping as a treat or as a recreational activity, compulsive shopping is a mental health disorder and can cause severe consequences," said Legg.

Legg said that people with shopping addictions get a "high" from making purchases, much like someone who misuses drugs.

Legg said, "Once the brain associates shopping with this pleasure or high, the person with a shopping addiction will try to recreate it again and again."

Because of a lack of research, Legg said that different studies show the average age of a person with a shopping addiction being both ages 30 and between ages 18 and 20, when people can get their own credit.

Those affected by shopping addictions have resources for recovery, said Legg. Programs like Shopaholics Anonymous and Debtors Anonymous are options, and the Federal Trade Commission offers tips to

relieve debt.

"Like other addictions, a compulsive shopper can relapse," said Legg. "But with the right support, they can learn coping strategies and get back on the road to recovery."

Though some struggle with online shopping addictions, others are able to control themselves while browsing online marketplaces.

For Meagan Brady, business and computer information systems sophomore, scanning online stores is as regular as three or four times a week, with a purchase once every two weeks to a month. Brady's favorite stores to shop at are the clothing stores Urban Outfitters and Lululemon.

"I don't think online shopping is dangerous," said Brady. "But my dad does. He always says, 'Is this a necessity?'"

Brady said that the best part about online shopping is receiving the packages from the college mail center, and that the worst is taking a chance on something that is on a "final sale" – meaning that, should that item not fit, she is unable to return it.

Brady said that the only online purchase she regrets was when "I thought I needed a necklace on sale, but I never wear it."

Brady said that her next online purchase will likely be for Christmas gifts.

"Getting a debit card was the worst decision of my life," said Brady.

Although I had cut myself off, I'm already looking online for Christmas presents. I participated in Black Friday. I have Nike.com bookmarked, and I've already contacted Fossil.com to ask for a promo code – and that's okay.

It's okay to shop and buy things for ourselves and those we care about. The key to safe shopping is awareness and control, two things that I'll have to learn one way or another.

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