

6 Narratives of Consumer Selves

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate and to add to the empirical results reported in the previous chapter. Most readers will have experienced an impulse buying episode and the feelings that are attached to it. Imagining the feelings that drive an addicted buyer to go shopping if one is not prone to addictive behaviours is more difficult, if at all possible. Therefore, the emphasis of this chapter is the description of the addictive experience. The hoped for effect is to increase the awareness and understanding of this oftentimes titled irrational form of consumption by 'listening' to the addicted buyers describing their feeling and by 'hearing' their stories.

6.1 DATA COLLECTION

As a way to capture the experience of addicted buyers and to compare and contrast their experience with that of non-addicted consumers, interviews were conducted with fifty-five consumers from various regions of England. Volunteers for these interviews were recruited from the mail survey conducted by Dittmar et al. (1995, 1996b). In total, eighteen utilitarian buyers (ten women, eight men), nineteen compensatory buyers (twelve women, seven men) and eighteen buying addicted consumers (sixteen women, two men) were interviewed. Due to the small number of men interviewees, especially in the group of addicted buyers, gender differences could not be systematically assessed in the present analysis.

The respondents were assigned to the three buyer groups based on their addictive buying score and the cut-off points established in the previous chapter. A few exceptions however were made based on the information obtained from the interviews. One addicted buyer (male) with an addictive buying score of forty-eight, which is just at the cut-off point, was classified as a compensatory buyer, and one compensatory buyer (male) was classified as an addicted buyer. The description of his buying behaviour left little doubt that he no longer was just a compensatory buyer. Further, since the focus of the interview was on their previous buying addiction, some of the recovered buying addicts whose score actually classified them as compensatory buyers were grouped into the addictive buying group.

Forty-seven of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the respondents' homes. Due to budget constraints, eight interviews had to be conducted over the phone. This had the drawback that no personal rapport could be established with the respondents and therefore more sensitive questions could not be asked. Both the face-to-face and the telephone interviews were based on a seven question interview guideline (see appendix B). Depending on the interview situation and the answers given by the respondents, further questions were asked to deepen the understanding of issues that were brought up by the respondents. The aim of the interviews was to emphasize the emic (= insider) point of view rather than to predetermine all questions. This is based on the reasoning that from within the Ivory tower of the academic world it is difficult to anticipate all those issues that are featured very highly in the life experiences of the 'real' consumer. The questions from the interview guideline thus served only as cues for the interviewees to talk about their experience with buying and to tell their stories. This was especially important when talking to addicted buyers since their story about buying is often their life story (which is *not* something they would tell a stranger over the phone, even if this stranger is an academic researcher). In order not to distort the emic perspective, throughout this chapter a lot of direct quotes from the interviews are used. This entails that grammatical errors, word repetitions or fill words as they often occur in spoken language are not corrected.

At times, also numbers are used to present certain findings. All numbers that are reported in this chapter are based on a frequency count of whether a respondent talked about a certain issue rather than on a count of how many times something was mentioned. The reason for this is that a frequency count of all occurrences would in many cases present an inadequate picture. Consider for instance the following example: Respondent A elaborates on a particular issue X a number of times throughout the interview. This issue is then consequently coded as many times as it is mentioned. Respondent B may mention the same issue only once, which means that is coded exactly one time. If one now compares the two respondents based on the number of times a code was assigned, one may arrive at the erroneous conclusion that issue X is much more important to respondent A than it is to respondent B just because respondent A was more articulate and talked about it more often.

A further aspect of open-ended interviews is that not all interviews cover the same issues. If a particular topic is only mentioned by four or five respondents out of a

group of eighteen it still can be a relevant issue. It may for instance be a particular manifestation of a certain consumption experience, which is not equally salient in the minds of all respondents. Nonetheless, it may also contribute an important part to the overall picture increasing the understanding of the entire phenomenon studied.

6.2 THE ANALYSIS PROCESS

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and analysed with the support of the software ATLAS.ti. The methodological details can be found in appendix B. An often criticised aspect of qualitative studies is that the transformation process from the raw data to the final report is difficult to trace. Therefore a novel attempt is made here to make this process more visible. On a CD ROM that can be obtained in addition to this book, the reader can find the coded interview data, a list and definition of all code words, network views of all conceptual relationships presented, and memos that explain the findings. The data can either be explored by using the provided demo software of ATLAS.ti or by opening a data file in an HTML format. This is a format that can be read by any web browser. Appendix C and D contain the necessary instructions to work with the data. If a network view (NWV) for any of the results presented below exists, then this is indicated in the text.

6.3 IMPULSE BUYING FROM THE EMIC POINT OF VIEW

In chapter 2, it became obvious that it is not an easy endeavour to define impulse buying and a number of researchers have already attempted to do so. The most convincing attempt was made by Rook (1998) who dropped the idea of finding a single unifying definition. Instead, he presented the various forms of impulse buying as a fuzzy set. The starting point of the present study was Stern's definition of pure impulse buying considering impulse buying as a 'spur of the moment' decision in the store. Based on Rook's classification, this comprises both casual and prototypical impulse buying. Casual impulse buying, according to Rook, likely involves "the purchase of relatively low-priced 'little somethings' that make consumers feel good, smart, special or creative. [...] Prototypical impulse buying is more arousing and urgent. The stakes are often higher, involving more money, more purchases and more

personal meaning" (p. 330-331). It can however be assumed that addicted buyers view their impulse buying behaviour somewhat differently. The interview data offer support for this assumption.

6.3.1 Three impulse buying perspectives

Asked how they would define impulse buying, all three buyer groups mentioned most frequently that an impulse purchase is a) an item that is not needed, a luxury that one could do without, and b) it is something that one just comes across, sees, likes and wants to buy. This closely matches the definition of suggestion impulse buying proposed by Stern (1962). Addicted buyers further include in their definition the desire to cheer themselves up, the compelling feeling to go shopping and the total disregard for the consequences. In addition, for addicted buyers impulse buying is not always equivalent to unplanned buying. If it is planned, it is not planned for very long, but the decision to buy is not necessarily made in the shop:

But then again you see, I can wake up in the morning and erm depending on what mood I'm in er, you know, I might think: Oh, I'll go and get so-and-so. And I would regard that as rather impulsive, you know.

I find something that I often do is, I'll be sitting in the house or wherever or perhaps in the office, specially if I'm having a boring day at work, and I suddenly jump up and think: I'm going to go and buy a dress, you know, and I I haven't thought of buying a dress or whatever until that moment.

Compensatory buyers like addicted buyers also associated impulse buying with mood modification. More frequently however they pointed out that impulse purchases are something extraordinary and special and that they most enjoy finding something unexpected. Both compensatory and some utilitarian buyers included reminder impulse purchases in their definition, and for many, rational thoughts like whether they can afford the item that attracts their attention are also part of the impulse buying experience. This is contrary to some of the other conceptions of impulse buying discussed in chapter 2. In Figure 6.1 the frequency of the various aspects of impulse buying based on the experiences of the respondents from the three buyer groups are listed.

Table 6.1: *Definition of impulse buying: Aspects considered by the various buyer groups*

	Addicted	Compensatory	Utilitarian
Not needed	10	9	9
Suggestion impulse	8	9	1
Reminder impulse	-	6	5
For the sake of buying	5	-	1
Urge to shop	3	-	-
Wanting a lift	4	2	-
Treat	-	5	3
Unexpected	2	8	-
Extraordinary	2	8	-
Disregard of consequences	4	-	-
Not within budget	-	-	3
Only if within budget	-	5	4
Enjoyment	11	10	6

As the respondents were not prompted with a list of aspects to consider, the numbers cannot be taken at face value. One can for example not conclude that only three of the nineteen utilitarian buyers perceive an impulse purchase as a treat. The other sixteen may also perceive it as such, but this is probably not the most salient aspect they associate with impulse buying. Some patterns however become visible: The emotional aspects in the second block seem to be much more important for addicted buyers than for other consumers. Impulse buying as an activity that breaks the normal routine of everyday life by enriching it with something special and unexpected is an aspect most often considered by the compensatory buyer.

The utilitarian buyers, as might be expected, appear to be the most levelheaded consumers with regard to impulse purchases. They however also get the least enjoyment out of it. Eleven addicted and ten compensatory buyers reported feelings of enjoyment and excitement with impulse buying, whereas only six of the utilitarian buyers mentioned such feelings. The gradual difference in enjoyment that exists between the three buyer groups is obvious in the following statements:

Addicted buyers

... when you you've got no excitement in your life you know. You go out to spend to have a little treat.

It gives me a real buzz to go in and buy them.

But erm it used to give me a an incredible high at the time of buying it.

In a funny way the secrecy actually makes it even better, do you know what I mean. It makes it more interes+ more exciting in a way. I am doing something I know I shouldn't.

Compensatory buyers

There's the phase where I go out like in a sale and I know it's the excitement that I'm going to find something.

It's quite exciting to think, er, even though one might be disappointed, on the other hand, one might be extremely pleased, you know, there are two, there are the two possibilities.

I suppose it gives you a little bit, em, a kick, sort of a spice. In fact, you are doing something that you haven't planned to do, em, it seems rather exciting and naughty, you know. I suppose the fact, it always seems more exciting when you've done it on impulse as when you actually have gone out and looked for it. It just seems to be more fun.

Utilitarian buyers

Whereas an impulse buy you you feel erm it is fun. It's much more enjoyable.

I suppose probably possibly the impulse buying might be slightly more enjoyable [laughs] than the planned buying.

I mean, when you've got plenty of money, I don't think impulse buying is would be any fun at all. I mean, if you can afford everything, then there's no fun in it, is there.

6.3.2 Three perspectives on planned buying

Since it is sometimes easier to explain and to understand something by what it is not, the respondents were also asked how they view planned buying in contrast to impulse buying. As above, the responses are summarized according to the classification into buyer groups.

The major characteristic of planned buying for all three buyer groups is first having defined a need before one goes out shopping. This may include the weekly grocery shopping, replacement purchases or big-ticket items. As can be seen in **Table 6.2**, planned buying is basically associated with rational consumer behaviour. One only buys what is needed; one saves up for it or considers one's budget; one shops around, searches for the best possible price and quality; the shopping activity is very directional and the consumer has specific shops in mind. Planned buying is however much less enjoyable than impulse buying, at least for some of the addicted and compensatory buyers. Interestingly, some utilitarian buyers also consider reminder impulse purchases as planned acquisitions.

Table 6.2: Definition of planned buying: Aspects considered by the various buyer groups

	Addicted	Compensatory	Utilitarian
Need	9	13	9
Budgeted for	6	5	8
Shop around	6	7	9
Directional	4	2	7
Less enjoyable	5	6	2
Reminder purchase	-	-	4

Addicted buyers, although they have provided a definition of planned buying, frequently do not engage in planned buying apart from buying essentials like food. This is for instance obvious in their frequent usage of the subjunctive when defining planned buying:

Well, planned buying I suppose, you're supposed to budget how much you've got left. But I don't have [laughs] anything left for buying clothes or anything really.

Probably sort of shop around a lot more. Erm. *Interviewer: Would you be willing to wait?* Probably more. More so.

I would think about it first of all. I+ the idea would occur to me that it would be a good thing to have so- and-so. And then erm, I I I wouldn't, I I I might go round er to the shops and I would look at things and I would look at the prices. [...] But then I would erm wait probably until I had sufficient money, which might be to the end of the month, you know.

More direct indications that addicted buyers hardly ever buy anything in a planned fashion are the following statements:

I don't really plan. I hardly ever plan buying nice things for myself, because I feel I shouldn't be buying things for myself, I should be paying of my debts. So I never actually consciously plan to buy something. I only plan to buy boring things like food, things that I absolutely need. And that is absolutely boring. [...] As I said, I don't think that I ever buy things planned.

We don't plan. We haven't got the money to go. And you see this is all my fault. Er we can't plan and go and buy a new car and a new sofa.

Erm I'd just, you know, I can't say I ever I've ever planned [laughs] to buy anything. This is the first plan that I've come up against er you know this (payment) plan for my two years.

The finding that addicted buyers hardly ever buy anything planned is interesting, as it contests some of the findings obtained from the survey (cf. Dittmar et al, 1996b). In the survey, the respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale how frequently they buy nine types of consumer goods as planned purchases and as impulse purchases. The scale points ranged from never (1) to at least once a week (6). As shown in **Table 6.3**, addicted buyers appear to buy overall more; independent of whether they purchase a good on impulse or in planned fashion.

Table 6.3: *Planned and impulse buying frequency across nine consumer goods*

	Planned buying frequency 0	Impulse buying frequency 0
Utilitarian	2.98	2.25
Compensatory	3.30	2.79
Addicted	3.53	3.19

The differences between the three buyer groups are all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).¹⁶ If one takes into account the nine types of consumer goods the respondents were specifically asked about, the addicted buyers showed a higher impulse frequency for eight of the nine consumer goods, and a higher planned buying frequency for six of them: kitchen items, clothes, music, jewellery, electronic leisure goods and footwear.

The question is what to make out of these contradictory findings, as one can only speculate what went through the respondents' mind when they answered the survey. Did they simply tick a number just because they felt like having to answer every question in the survey? (Interestingly, all addicted buyers answered all of the planned and impulse buying frequency questions, whereas eighteen utilitarian and thirteen compensatory buyers did not.) Or did the addicted buyers imagine a hypothetical situation guessing how often they would buy a particular item in a planned fashion if they were to engage in planned buying? A fair assumption is that the interview data are trustworthier than such speculations, which attests to the usefulness of qualitative data to illuminate and to add to quantitative survey findings.

6.3.3 Reasons for impulse buying

For both utilitarian and compensatory buyers, the three main reasons for impulse buying were mood states, an opportunity buy or a bargain. In addition to that, the compensatory buyers mentioned a few more reasons. They considered shopping also as a way to get out of the house, to have some time by oneself or with a good friend and to enjoy a little timeout from family or other responsibilities. Impulse purchases

¹⁶ This result is based on a least-significant difference test, which was conducted as a follow up of an ANOVA. The initial ANOVA showed that the three buyer groups differ highly significantly with regard to the buying frequency for both planned and impulse purchases ($p < 0.00001$)

were regarded as a part of this experience and made this time more enjoyable. Further aspects of impulse buying were the experience of control and power when buying something for oneself, and the desire to treat or to reward oneself. Compensatory buyers thus have a larger repertoire of reasons for impulse buying than utilitarian buyers. And, as might be expected, the repertoire of addicted buyers is even larger. They use buying as a reaction to many different life situations as was strikingly formulated by one respondent: “Oh yeah. Yeah. Cope with anything go shopping. [laughs] But I don't cope with me.” This is also reflected in the responses given by other addicted buyers. The three main reasons given for impulse buying were mood states, filling the empty self and gaining freedom and independence through buying, whereby the mood related reasons were the most diverse in comparison with the two other buyer groups. Two further motives were the desire to be in control and social comparison (e.g., not wanting to lag behind others, or employ buying as a means of distinction). Thus, all reasons referred to by addicted buyers for impulse buying were psychological in nature, whereas the two other buyer groups also mentioned economic incentives (see **Figure 6.1** on the next page).

6.3.4 Summary

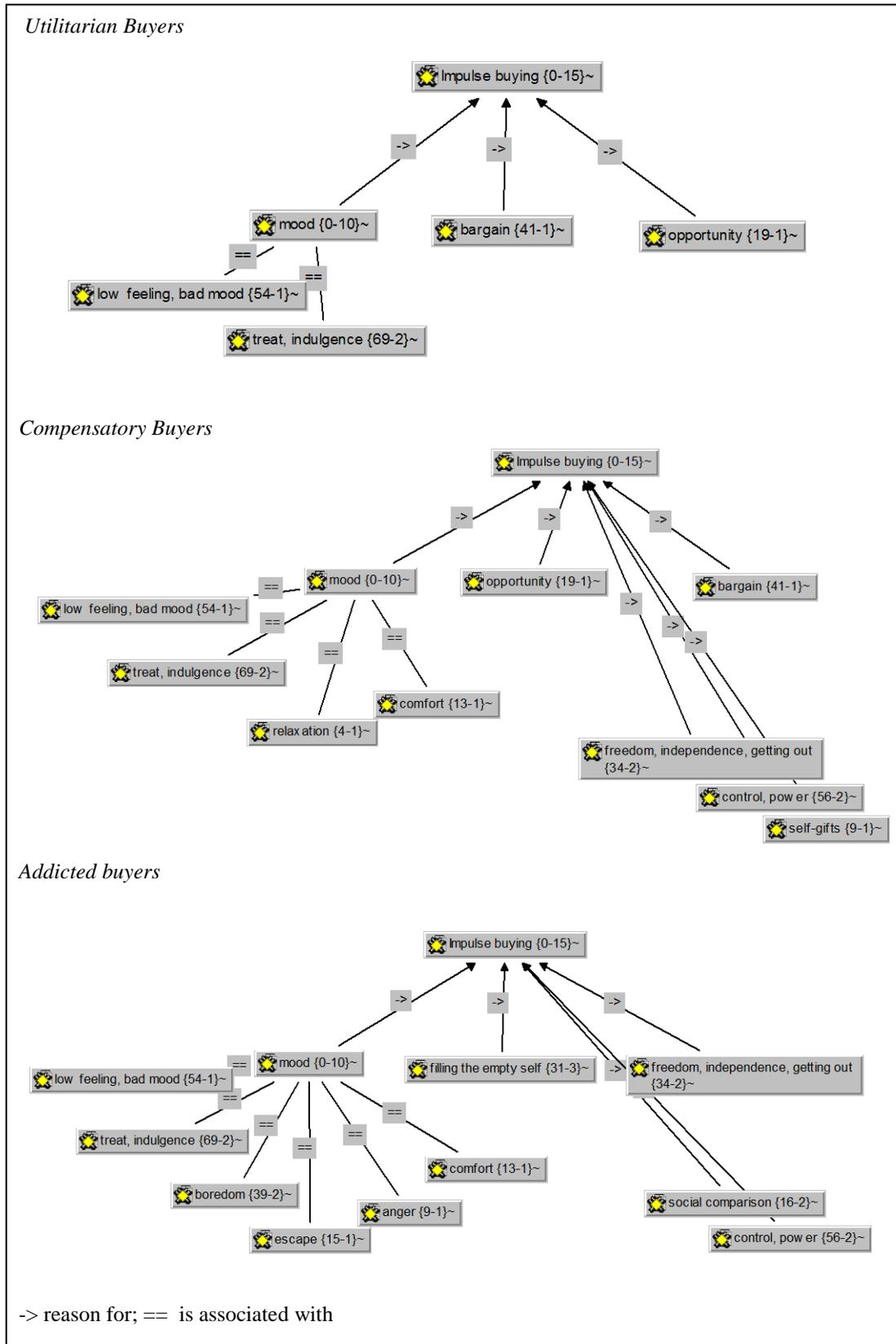
Based on the interview data, the following definitions of impulse and planned buying grounded in the emic experiences of the various buyer groups can be given.

6.3.4.1 Emic definitions of impulse buying

Addicted buyers

Impulse buying is when you buy an item you see, like and then want but not necessarily need and you don't consider the consequences. The main purpose is to buy the item because it will cheer you up and make you feel better (see *NWV_1*).

Figure 6.1: *Reasons for impulse buying*



Compensatory buyers

Impulse buying is when you buy an item you see, like and want that is not necessarily needed. It could however be that you have thought about buying the item beforehand and now you just see it at a good price or in a particular style, colour, etc. that you really like, so you buy it right there and then. You particularly enjoy the purchase because it provides a little change from the everyday life routine and/or you feel like deserving a treat. You however would not buy it, if it meant to break your finances (see NWV_2).

Utilitarian buyers

Impulse buying is when you buy an item you see, like and want that is not necessarily needed. It could however be that you have thought about buying the item beforehand and now you just see it at a good price or in a particular style, colour, etc. that you really like, so you buy it right there and then. Considering your finances before buying the item is important, but at times you feel that especially impulse purchases are those that go a bit over the top and you spend more than you normally would (see NWV_3).

6.3.4.2 Emic definitions of planned buying*Addicted buyers*

A planned purchase would be something that is needed, e.g. a replacement purchase. You probably would make a list and stick to this list. You would search for the best prices and compare various options, or if you already know what you want, you would go straight to the shop and get it. You probably would wait until you find what you want and you would either save up or budget for it. In comparison to impulse buying, planned buying is more organized and levelheaded but boring. At times, you regret money spent on planned purchases because it takes resources away that could be used for a more enjoyable impulse buy (see NWV_4).

Compensatory buyers

A planned purchase is something you need, an everyday item, a big-ticket item, or a replacement purchase. You shop around, compare prices and get the best deal.

Before buying you consider your financial situation. Overall, however, planned buying is less enjoyable. It is controlled, organized and boring (see NWV_5).

Utilitarian buyers

Planned purchases are necessity purchases. You first define a need. You budget for such purchases, getting a bargain however is not always important. You shop around to gather information about the product and then you plan a shopping trip to buy it. You also consider a spontaneous purchase of an item that you previously have thought about buying as a planned purchase (see NW_6V).

From the above descriptions, it is evident that the three buyer groups attach different meanings to impulse buying and planned buying. This is also reflected on Rook's fuzzy set impulse buying continuum. With regard to impulse buying, the utilitarian buyers can be found at the lower end of the fuzzy set between contingent and casual impulse, the compensatory buyers can be classified as casual to prototypical, and the addictive buyers are situated further right at the emotional end. It needs to be added that although Rook presents addictive buying at the one end of a continuum, he acknowledges that somewhere along the continuum a qualitative shift occurs. This supports the perspective presented in the previous chapter that addictive buying is not simply an extreme form of impulse buying. Therefore, in the following, if comparisons are made between the three buyer groups, it should be kept in mind that it makes a difference whether a utilitarian, a compensatory or an addicted buyer talks about impulse buying.

6.4 THE ADDICTIVE BUYING EXPERIENCE

In order to give the non-buying-addicted reader the best impression of what the addictive buying experience is like, before any interpretation is offered, at first, voice is given to the addicted buyer. The examples chosen below represent the various aspects of the experience. Some of these aspects are common to all addicted buyers, whereas others show the manifold manifestations of the behaviour (cf. also NWV_A1).

Example 1: I was paid on Fridays and spent the money right away. On Wednesday I couldn't wait for Friday thinking what can I buy with the money. I couldn't bare the thought of something running out, couldn't get enough of a certain product, what if I am running out? When catalogue shopping, the

ordering was fun, phoning and then waiting for the parcels, looking for the van, when they arrived. I looked at the packages, got the scissors and opened them. After that the adrenaline stopped rushing through my body. I had to take the items out of the package in order to hide them. I didn't send things back. I don't know why, even if they wouldn't fit. Oh well, I thought, putting them away in the cupboard seemed like the right thing to do. I felt guilty sending it back, was almost too lazy to do it. Some things I didn't try on, gave it to my sister. Some outfits I really do like and wear them. Possessing became the most important thing.

Shopping also kept my mind off things. Sometimes, when the bill came, I couldn't remember what I had spent the money on. It overtook completely. The high point was when I was coming out of the shop with the bags. Coming home felt almost like a relief. That's it, don't have to worry about spending that money. In the end I was forging my husband's signature on checks. It stopped when I got caught, realizing what I was doing.

Example 2: Erm it's erm a craving. I think it must be similar to erm the craving how drug users get you know. But it, er, sometimes erm I've wanted to buy something on impulse sometimes and I've walked away and resisted it and and yet it's been with me all the time. It's been with me for days and I've gone back and got it.

Example 3: I wouldn't want to get into conversation with them over anything. [laughs] Just like go out of my way to like avoid people if I saw them out shopping. [...] I think I was always like rushing off from one sort of thing to the other. Erm, you know, like in my lunch hour, I'd sort of have like set myself this sort of trail. I'm going to get there and I'm going to go round there. I'm going to get this and. And I'd be like for ever up and down some of the distances I used to go to. [laughs] Erm you know, it didn't matter that it was right, you know, quite a distance from where I worked. I'd still make it.

Example 4: I'd felt I'd feel really good dressing up for it (the shopping spree) before I went. 'Cos as I said, you know, I'd sort of wear clothes to suit the image. 'Cos I also found that if you dressed sort of quite smartly and stuff, the make-up, the assistants treat you sort of better. They give you free samples and that kind of thing and all sorts. Erm, I enjoyed that and I enjoyed sort of I just really enjoyed walking through through the shops. I'd go, I'd go during the day or during the week and you'd see lots of other people who really were like I was trying to sort of emulate and you know. It was just really really I I s+ I really enjoyed it. I sort of felt that I was, it was like a big sort of game of let's pretend really. I felt really really good and then I'd get home and be like I'd feel quite miserable once I got home. Because I did have to, although I I did use the things I had to hide them away from my parents. And that's what I didn't like. Because that made me feel guilty and that made me realize that I shouldn't have done it you know.

Example 5: It's just getting to that shop to buy the jeans (a planned purchase) erm, it's the ones that I pass before I arrive at that shop and then go in that's my impulse buying. Erm, a lot of the tr+ the lot of the trouble I have is because my bank is located downtown in the shopping centre. [...] I get the money out of the bank and say for instance I'm going for the jeans, I'll pass several shops first and I'm in and out and I'll be spending money and none of that will be planned. And several times I've even come home without the planned item. I come home without the jeans or whatever.

Interviewer: Mm. So I mean how. Can you describe how you feel if you've just walked by a shop and you just have this urge to go in and buy something?

No. I can't. I can't tell you how bad it is. [pause] No, I can't tell you how bad it is. Nothing else matters, that's all I can say, nothing else matters. If I see something in the window of a shop, erm, say for instance an item of clothing for my daughter and I know it's an expensive designer-wear shop. I'll think first: Have I got enough money with me. I'll check that I've got my credit cards and I'll be saying to myself, it's like having a split personality. Go away walk away get on a bus get a taxi home even. Get a

taxi go straight home, think about it. And I find myself I'll be in the shop and the only fear I will have is [pause] my greatest fear is going in a shop and not having enough money. But with my credit cards, I know I'm going to be okay. And if I like the thing and it's the right size I won't ask the price I'll just say: I'll take it. [...] I only really exist anyway for my daughter, erm, and at the moment when I am spending money. I think, well, one side of me's saying so what, it's only money, it's my money. I can spend it. [...] I've got no other pleasures. I don't go out, I don't mix with people, I don't drink, I don't smoke. And then er the rational side of me'll be saying, not, don't spend it but save it until next week and you'll have twice as much to spend.

Interviewer: And you can't I mean can't even save it until next week?

No. No. I've tried to do it. I've tried to say to myself don't spend any money this week, mark on your calendar the following Friday and get a train to town X or town Y and blow the lot. But I can't go the full week. I can't actually go out of the front door, it's true, without money in my pockets. I can't take my daughter to the big, we've got a big park around the corner and I can't take her there without at least five pounds, ten pounds in my pocket for the ice creams, cafeteria, boat rides et cetera. I could never go out without money.

Interviewer: How would you feel if you were to go out without any money?

I just cannot get out of the door. I can't get out of the door. I've tried it. I had my purse, I lost my purse or I had it stolen I don't remember and I reported my credit cards missing. This is probably one of the worst things I can remember. And it would take some time to have them replaced, the credit cards. So this particular three days I had no income, no money at all. And, erm, I thought I'll just stay in for the three days and every time I came to the front door to go to pick my daughter up or take her to school, I couldn't do it and for the three days. erm I con+ well for the first day I contemplated keeping her off school so I wouldn't have to go out and I thought well that's not fair on her so my mum ended up taking her for the three days. You know, maybe if she'd have said to me: I'm not taking her you take her, but she said: It's all right, I'll take her. For three days I didn't go out. And then when my credit cards came, it was like I can only I would say a diabetic getting their insulin. They came. Erm while the post was still coming through the door, I recognized the envelopes, I was telephoning a taxi to come and get me to go out.

Interviewer: Mm. I mean have you ever thought of that being an addictive behaviour?

Absolutely. Can't see it as being anything else. I know somebody who's an alcoholic and they've described to me what it's like to go without a drink and I thought to myself: God that's just like me without money, without trying to spend any.

Interviewer: Mm. I mean are you kind of afraid of erm hitting the wall or kind of like facing up to how much you spend?

Absolutely, yeah, it terrifies me. The thought that one day this is going to come to a head, it's going to stop. I will one day have all my cards taken off me. I won't have an income of any kind. It's just like Armageddon really. I don't know what I'll do. I can see myself starting asking my parents to borrow money from them. I don't think my friends see it as a problem though. I think they think it's comical really.

The last example is a very extreme case and not all addicted buyers feel the same way, but the description of her feelings also contains elements that are experienced by other addicted buyers. One of these elements is the comparison with other addictions, which also has been mentioned by a number of other buying addicts:

You know, maybe like an alcoholic, there comes a time when I think, well, er maybe it's the same sort of thing, well just what is going on. You can't carry on like this.

I'll get a real down the next day just like an alcoholic hangover.

I mean, it's like somebody erm who's an alcoholic you know. You still go on a, you know, er on a binge sort of thing, you know. I think it's the same with shopping.

Other common elements are the reliance on credit cards, the lack of alternative compensation mechanisms, the focus on the shopping behaviour, the lack of the ability to wait, the high feelings during the shopping experience and the feelings of guilt afterwards. All of these elements are explained in greater detail throughout the next sections.

6.4.1 Lack of alternative compensation mechanisms

The statements below show that addicted buyers cannot conceive of either an alternative activity that would give them the same pleasure as buying or an activity that would not cost any money:

At the moment I can't really think what gives me the greater pleasure now. It's hard for me to think of something because everything seems very mundane. It seems to come to second place. I could do all those things but I still need to go shopping.

I find it still very difficult to do something else to, erm, to give me that sort of, you know, er peace of mind and feeling, you know, to have something to fill my day. Going to the park, looking at a tree or, you know, I still find it very difficult.

I don't know. I feel as though I can't go out now and really join a gym or something 'cos I'm guilty really. I mean I shouldn't be doing it because it would mean spending extra money, which we haven't got.

In comparison, addicted buyers who are in the process of overcoming their addiction have re-discovered their ability to get enjoyment out of other activities and have found other ways to give themselves little treats.

I'm starting to get that now. Like going swimming, I'm enjoying it. You know, I should maybe treat myself go to the pool or go to the library and get so+ I really love reading and going to the library and getting some books. And it's a treat because our local library where I used to live is pathetic but here in town X it's a brilliant library and it's great and I'm just getting all these books. My boyfriend coming for a visit, that's a treat. [laughs] So you know having people to stay here is really really nice.

Two of the compensatory buyers at first also could not conceive of an activity that would give them the same pleasure as buying, but on second thoughts they could name other activities they similarly enjoyed doing. The other compensatory buyers mentioned a variety of things they would do if they had a bad day or felt miserable:

And when I feel miserable I tend to want to just be on my own [laughs] and eat a lot. [laughs] But [pause] Or I just ring a friend.

...doing something just a bit different or a bit special that's interactive. I mean I love going to the movies. That's a er that's a brilliant way to relax as well but if you go out for a meal then it's interactive isn't it because you're sitting with the person and you're getting a chance to talk to them.

Erm [pause] go down the pub with my mates [laughs] that sort of thing. Or go and get a video. Sometimes go and get a video out. That's about it.

These are the responses of the utilitarian buyers to the same question:

I would have a foam bath or I would go for a run or go to the cinema or erm rather than shopping. Occasionally shopping but no, it wouldn't be, it wouldn't be one of the first things that I'd do because I had a bad day.

When I was at work and I'd had a bad day at the office I have a corner of the garden over here and no matter what the weather was like, I used to go and dig it over.

Almost anything else. Erm I mean the things I enjoy erm recreational walking erm particularly with my dogs. I sing with a choir, erm, I love er pubbing and erm socializing with friends and and or just being at home and being in my garden. I certainly wouldn't go out of my way to shop.

6.4.2 Feeling high

With one exception, all interviewed addicted buyers reported experiencing a 'high' during the shopping experience. In comparison, most non-addicted buyers did not experience such intense feelings even though at times they also compared their feelings during an impulse buying episode with a 'high'. However, it can be seen from the following quotes, that the essence of the feelings reported by the addicted buyers is different. Let us at first consider some of the descriptions offered by compensatory buyers:

I wouldn't just spend the money and go into debt. I would still be responsible but erm I would probably get a big kick about buying something for a pound that was worth five pound that was good quality. [...] If it's a great quality, dead cheap, I buy it. And and it sets me up for the day, you know.

...seems sort of naughty, you know, not daring but it gives you a blow, I suppose, an excitement, the fact that you found something you weren't looking for. I get the same sometimes, when I browse. [...] I used to find it more exciting when I used to come back on the bus, when I had four or five bags with me. I mean, now I always put it in the boot and come home. It doesn't seem to be such an adventure as it was before when you had to plan what bus you were catching and coming back out.

I get the same pleasure out of talking my mum into buying something when she buys something. So it's not even the spending of the money or buying something for myself.

In comparison, these are the description of the addicted buyers' high feeling:

But erm it used to give me a an incredible high at the time of buying it. It lasts while I am in the shop, it lasts until I get it home in the car. Then I think I better hide this so that my daughter doesn't see them. She starts making comments that I am spending too much on clothes.

But, erm, yeah definitely sometimes a real high, a real buzz. And definitely sort of like a sort of racing feeling. *Interviewer: ...your heart is going?* Yeah. Yeah definitely.

It felt a high. Yeah. In fact I mean the anxiety was, er, the first time was almost a high when I think about it, but it was really really a sort of terrifying high. Whereas this as it progressed it was then a pleasant high. It wasn't frightening. The first couple of times it was. *Interviewer: Mhm. Did you also feel a bit er grandiose and, you know, feelings of power?* It was definitely that. That was what, that was the aspect of it that caused the high. The [pause] mm [pause] it was almost sort of feeling erm reckless and daring to just spend, even though I hadn't got the money.

I have a, erm, it's like a taste in my mouth, a dry mouth, erm, a ringing in my ears, believe it or not. Sometimes my vision will s+ well I'll be swaying a bit, I'll have to reach out something to steady

myself. And I've often thought I'm having an attack, an anxiety attack or or whatever but it can't be because it seems to be every time I'm going in to spend money. *Interviewer: When do you get that feeling?* I get it before I spend the money.

Utilitarian shoppers, in contrast, only go as far as to talk about experiencing a pleasant feeling:

Whereas the actual process, I mean, if you're in the right mood and you're relaxed and you're out that for a moment can be fun, pleasant...

As can be seen from the above descriptions, compensatory buyers may talk about experiencing a 'high', a 'buzz', a 'blow' or a 'kick', but none of them elaborates on this feeling, whereas addicted buyers often described their high feelings in more detail. Further, addicted buyers never mentioned their financial situation in the context of describing their 'high' and they usually only experienced a 'high' when purchasing something and not when just browsing or talking others into buying something. In fact, talking others into buying something is not part of the addictive buying experience since addicted buyers, when in the addictive buying mood, always go shopping alone. They may enjoy the social aspect of being among other people, stopping for a cup of coffee, watching the crowd, but they don't like to meet somebody they know or to take somebody with them on their shopping sprees because they might talk them out of buying something:

I mean some people shop in pairs, don't they, and they like to have a second opinion when they buy something. But I've never liked that. I find that it puts me off, you know.

I wouldn't want to get into conversation with them over anything. [laughs] Just like go out of my way to like avoid people if I saw them out shopping.

Never ever with anybody else. Because then I couldn't be the person I was pretending to be.

Some compensatory buyers also prefer to be on their own, mainly when impulse buying, but they equally enjoy a shopping trip together with other people (cf. NWV_A7).

6.4.3 The buying urge

The reason why addicted buyers feel the need to buy something has to do with the underlying need they attempt to satisfy. The act of buying and bringing something home is an action they do solely for themselves. The purchased objects however can also be for someone else. This is frequently the case if the underlying need is to receive love and approval.

Finding out what the underlying need is that demands satisfaction is the key for overcoming the addiction (cf. section 6.8). All those who are still struggling with the addiction feel that there is something there, which drives them to go shopping, but they cannot put their finger on it. They realize that buying is not going to satisfy this need, however, they are unable to stop it because the urge is too strong and overpowering. Let's listen again to some addicted buyers and how they experience this:

Erm [pause] but I think it's all to do with you know how I think of myself. There always seems to be one more thing I need and then I'll have everything I need. But of course as soon as I get that I very soon think of one more thing and so it goes on you know. Erm, and I know really that none of these things are making any difference. That that's not what it's all about. But erm, you know, I think: Well, if I just buy this then I'll have everything I need and then I can stop spending money and be sensible. And I never do. [laughs]

I wonder why I buy those things. Why don't I just wait until it's something that, you know, I feel is absolutely right. I don't know why I buy those other things. Well cer+ it might be something that I feel I need.

Sometimes I feel I'm there but as I say er you know every so often I have this feeling. If I just buy such and such a thing, you know, and then it'll be right.

It's just like wanting, you know, the wanting to possess another book. Er and not waiting to finish one but you know the sort of the gratification must come there. [...] Wanting it you know grati+ being gratified quickly. [pause] I suppose a hunger you know, it's like kind of a really hungry erm [pause] not hungry in you know food in that sort of erm symbolic but you're hungry for something. So I must have er, you know, er go home er h+ heavy [laughs] you know, got many bags to carry. So it's like I've filled my life with s+ you know something that day and, you know, some good feelings every day.

I'm aware I think I'm very aware I don't know how I compare with other people you talk to but but it's it's all about fulfilling me. [...] Cope with anything go shopping. [laughs] But I don't cope with me. It doesn't, it doesn't, I know it. You know, this is what I'm still saying that I'm just looking for that flaming answer to stop it, you know, just desperately needing because it's just not, it is not right.

So I'm doing it for me, spending, even though I spend on my daughter, I'm doing it for me.

It could be that the fact nobody else is doing good for me. Yeah. That might be it. [...] I keep coming back to this thing where there always seems to be one more thing that I need. So it's, you know, I don't know. As I say I'm not not an expert [laughs] in psychoanalysis but does it mean that there's something missing out of my life and I'm kind of I'm transferring it. [pause]

I don't know that it's it's all for me erm and it's like er but I it I mean to me it's like trying to make myself feel better but I don't know why because I don't feel I don't believe on the outside I feel bad or. [...] It's me. It's mine. It's possible mm. *Interviewer: Mm. Mm. So it's not an image you try to buy.* No. No and it's it's only, I always, whenever I'm doing it, it's me I'm pleasing.

...it was just the feeling that I just had to have bought a possession that was mine. [laughs] And that pair of tights was going to be mine. [...] It was just to sort of give yourself that little boost. That that's all it came down to.

But I mean what a waste, why did I do it. It feels like that. Why did I do it? Why do I do it. Why, why did I? Why? And why do I get so lonely. [pause] And then you feel guilty. There must be a reason for it all.

This hunger induced by the unsatisfied need manifests itself in different ways but it always inspires the addicted consumer to purchase something, be it an item for oneself

or for others. One respondent expressed her feelings as follows: "If I came home empty handed, I felt depressed because I've not got anything. Nothing to make me feel better for that day. My fix. That sounds silly, fix."

If the motive has to do with doing something good for oneself (because nobody else is doing it), or with filling the empty self, craving for love, making the day a good day, then possessing the item becomes very important. It is not so important to get use out of the item, although this is often used as an opportune justification. Moreover, it is substantial to have something that one can call me or mine and that nobody can take away. The purchased items may symbolize stability and security following the logic: If everything else goes wrong, I still have something. This may be based on the experience that human beings are not reliable. They can be nice one day but mean the other; they may embrace me one moment, but hurt me the next. This often results in the inability to wait and/or in the purchase of multiple items, following the maxim: If I don't buy it now, it may not be there tomorrow:

... say you go into a shop and see several things that you like and choose one you know. And then for some reason a time came where if I was in that situation, I'd just buy the lot. Erm and I think [pause] that then becomes the normal thing to do.

I mean it's just the idea of carrying a whole bunch of things, you know. A lot of things. I loved coming home with all the bags. The best part of it was coming home, throwing the things on the bed and looking at the bags

It's just a desperate sort of, er, it's wanting to sort of, it's just wanting to treat yourself. It's really selfish. It's a very sort of selfish thing wanting to really treat yourself. [...] I think it's a real sort of mm it's it's the feeling about desperately desperately wanting it. And and that's the main thing of it really I think. So obviously if it's not there, got this awful feeling of not being able to survive without it. And in actual fact you could survive without it but it's when you really so desperately want this item. [...] There's just this sort of panic. I mean you know if I don't get it now it might not be there the next week and all that kind of thing.

Like with a CD, one is not enough. You know it's two three and four. [gasps] Ah and perhaps if this one, it's you know it's good to have five [laughs] CDs. It's erm [pause] erm [pause] it it's like, you know, if you never have had enough, it's like the more you have the more hm. One CD in an evening you know. Er it's like believing that there's a scarcity around you know. That there is a lack. So you don't buy just one loaf of bread, you know, buying and the whole lot. You want to shop until bread has gone because fearing that, you know: Oh God. Bank holidays, the baker will have closed so you must fill your house, you know. Er, believing that, you know, there won't be enough. It's like, you know, one CD won't be enough to quench that sort of, you know, need. I must have more. *Interviewer: Mm. So does this also has to do with security do you think?* Well yes. You know, you think five and you know erm, the world is not so, doesn't look so empty. My life doesn't look so empty, you know. Got five CDs around me. So you know what unconscious motive is it that, you know, for a child or for, you know. I didn't have much love around me. It's like you feel, you know, you think that there's very little er around you. So you know [snorts], you won't you know cancel it.

The importance of having for the addicted buyer is also supported by the survey results. One question in the survey was: "What I enjoy about shopping is having the products when I get home." The respondents were asked to rate this question on a six-

point scale going from (1) not at all true for me to (6) very true for me. The means for the utilitarian, compensatory and addicted buyers were 3.56, 4.28 and 4.67, respectively. A follow up contrast after an initial highly significant ANOVA showed that the mean scores of the group of compensatory and the addicted buyers differed significantly from those of the utilitarian buyers ($p > 0.05$). The desire to have, to own and to possess is however not necessarily related to the desire to have a particular item. This is shown by the result of the next survey question, which reads: "What I enjoy about shopping is the atmosphere and the shopping experience itself, never mind *what* I buy." Addicted buyers once again had the highest mean score: 1.89 (utilitarian), 2.79 (compensatory) and 3.37 (addicted buyers). This time the difference between all three buyer groups was statistically significant. A qualitative example of the desire or need to have, no matter what, is the following exchange with an interview respondent:

Interviewer: So just looking round for something you like and then buying it? Buying it and getting home with it. Interviewer: Mm. And then do you ever take it out and try it on? I don't. Don't know. I just buy things if I see them in the shop. It's a way of getting out of the house, isn't it? It's like an excuse. Interviewer: Mm. But following that reasoning you could go the next day and return the item. This would also get you out of the house. No, I wouldn't. [pause] Because it's mine. I've bought it. I wanted it. Interviewer: So it's really important to have it? Yeah.

For this respondent, neither the shopping experience nor getting use out of the purchased items are important. She stores the items almost immediately after the shopping trip in the loft to hide them from her husband and never uses them. Asked how she felt if she gave all of the items away, she responded that it would feel like a part of her would go with them since these are things that belong to her. They constitute a part of who she is, taking the place of an unsatisfied immaterial need: "I think, it's love isn't it? I mean trying to mm give myself love. Make myself feel better."

Which form this kind of substitution takes, whether a) the entire shopping experience is part of it, like dressing up for 'it', carrying designer bags and being waited on by the shop assistants, or b) whether the addiction is manifest in buying items for other people (i.e., family members, friends) or in buying nice clothing for oneself, or c) whether it is most important to come home with loads of bags or at least with some little thing that one can call mine, depends on the kind of need the addicted buyers try to satisfy and the kind of experience they have had with buying and material goods in the past (cf. section 6.5).

6.4.4 The consequences

The dangerous part of shopping is that it provides elements that are experienced as pleasurable. It is either the buying itself, the full bags, the waiting for the parcels, the acquisition and/or the shopping atmosphere that provide brief moments of pleasurable feelings, the 'high'. Therefore, there is the great temptation to engage in buying again if one once more feels uncomfortable, negative or fed up. The consequences can be quite severe including debts, forfeited financial securities, lost opportunities, relationship problems, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of guilt related to the self.

I had such bad trouble in the past like I lost my house and that. [...] I spent about twenty-five thousand and then there was about eight thousand that my dad left me. So I suppose in the end I spent about thirty-three thousand in about two years. [...] I kept drawing out insurance policies and paying them off. But then I run out. But when I run out of insurance policies then there wasn't anything to pay it off. So I had to remortgage the house then.

And the grief and the anxiety and the trouble I caused myself, was constantly spending money, getting into debt, then worrying about that and....

I just thought I can't go on with this any more; I can't possibly go to court. I can't face all that I'm not strong enough. You've handled MX's death, you can, and I thought: No, just say, well that was just it, that was, that destroyed me that was the final thing, I can't take any more. And I just thought how easy it would be, you know, just to end it all.

I think the overall effect has been that I've become very bitter about the way our lives have sort of turned out. Because erm it's er it's meant that as a result we've got quite a few loans. [...] We've been paying off that has meant that we haven't got as much spending money as we should have. So things like for the income that we have we ought to be able to afford really good holidays but we don't have that. And we should have like a really low mortgage and everything but because it's been - remortgaging and loans - we've just ended up with just so much debt and it's really going to be about another four years I think before we really start to see the light. And it's meant things like if we decide to have children that I have to go back to work. Erm and I just feel really angry about that 'cos I feel angry. I don't know, I just feel it's my fault.

Like we've not had a holiday now for five years, paying off all the old debts.

I put over 17,000 pounds in a year on my credit card. I have no idea where all that money went. I lost my flat in city X, all my savings and inheritance.

And so I was feeling really really guilty and then of course once he'd started questioning about where I got it and when I got it and you know, he knew that I'd had it a long time and bought it a long time but it was his way of questioning me on it. It was a bad feeling between us.

I've just spent, spent, spent. I've spent [pause] I mean, built up a nine thousand pounds credit card. I mean I didn't have any money coming in. I'm just, it's just so easy. They give you them (credit cards). You just get one and they increase your limit even without asking. See each one was about up to three thousand pound. And then I [sighs] I knew that I just couldn't As I say the lady in the bank she was really understanding. [...] But sometimes I sit and work the interest I pay out on that, six or seven thousand. I mean imagine if husband's name found out that I owed, I couldn't risk it. [laughs]. [...] But you start and you just can't stop. I mean now it's too late. It is just too late. I mean I'd rather kill myself than tell him. At the moment I can't even think two years ahead. I've just got to get through each day. I just have to take each day as it comes. [...] Sometimes I'm so afraid of talking aloud in the night, having nightmares when I'm asleep. [laughs] I mean I can't help it, just frightened.

So in the end it made me even more depressed especially when [pause] the financial situation started to actually sink in and I realized, you know, because I'd totally ignored all the consequences, it all sort of, it was horrendous when it all actually came. I realized, thought: My God. I saw all these statements and realized how much money I owed and what a mess I'd got myself into. And then it was horrible.

As predicted by both McCracken's and Campbell's theory, the ultimate consequence of the behaviour is self-condemnation. Instead of elevating levels of self-esteem, the unsuccessful attempts of addicted buyers to make themselves feel better and the fact that others might suffer because of their spending habits increase the already existing negative self-feelings, adding further pressure to compensate.

The negative consequences addicted buyers eventually have to face contribute little in helping them to overcome their addiction. Financial problems may temporarily hinder the addict to go on buying sprees, but they do not stop the underlying need from demanding satisfaction. Depressions won't suddenly cease because of it and negative self-feelings still continue to overpower the addict's mind. If the previous buying pattern cannot be upheld due to a lack of financial resources, then the longing that drives the addiction will just express itself in different ways, e.g. via binge eating. Some buying addicts channel their addiction into buying smaller items:

I can't stop buying magazines. I buy about ten a week. Addicted to magazines. I just can't help it.

It might not be buying clothes but you might treat yourself to a chocolate bar or a cream cake. So it's the same sort of thing, isn't it? Except it's not so much money, but it's still looking for excitement.

In comparison, none of the compensatory and utilitarian buyers mentioned any negative consequences due to their buying. Some compensatory buyers experienced brief periods of guilt about having spent money a bit frivolously without thinking much about it, but overall it had no lasting negative effects. Mothers often experienced feelings of guilt if they had bought something for themselves because they felt that they should first think about the needs of their families. Another reason for feeling guilty is that buying something on impulse is regarded as not the 'right' thing to do because it contradicts the puritan value orientation that still seems to prevail in the heads of the consumers. Impulse buying is experienced by many as something one is not supposed to do. This however only increases its attractiveness and makes it even more desirable.

In summary, from the above statements it can clearly be seen that the addictive buying experience is qualitatively different from the buying experience of non-addicted consumers. In order to understand why some people come to rely so heavily

on behaviour like buying, the life histories of those who are addicted to it offer some clues. This is where the next section now turns to.

6.5 THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

To say it up front, the following section cannot provide a definite answer to the nagging question that troubles many addicted buyers: "Why can't I stop it, why do I have to go out and spend and spend and spend.....?" The reason is that the answer to these questions lies within every person's personal life story. What this section can offer are examples of life circumstances and experiences that very likely contribute to the development of the buying addiction. Based on these examples an understanding is developed of what buying means to addicted buyers and why they feel the urge to engage in it.

In chapter 5, a number of factors related to the development of addictive buying were already mentioned: mental disorders, inconsistent parental behaviour, feelings of deprivation, education into incompetence, equating love with material goods, desperate but unsuccessful attempts of seeking approval, over-controlling influences and the suppression of feelings. All of these factors could also be observed in the interviews. An additional factor that emerged was sibling rivalry. From **Table 6.4** it can be seen that some of the factors were also mentioned by the two other buyer groups, but not with the same frequency.

Table 6.4: *Life experiences of addicted, compensatory and utilitarian consumers*

	Addicted	Compensatory	Utilitarian
Approval seeking, pleasing	11	4	3
Shopping = Freedom	9	2	1
Material goods = Love	7	-	-
Overcontrolling influences	8	1	-
Education into incompetence	5	1	-
Sibling rivalry	3	1	-
Inconsistent parental behaviour	3	-	-
Feelings of deprivation	3	-	-
Suppression of feelings	6	-	-
Traumatic experiences	4	-	-
Mental disorders	7	-	1

Approval seeking and the strong tendency to please others is the most frequent observation across all three consumer groups and in comparison by far the most prevalent among buying addicts. This factor can be regarded as a symptom of some deeper-rooted issues to which most of the other factors contribute (see). For example, the feeling that a sibling is preferred by either the mother or the father or inconsistent parental behaviour can be a reason why a person feels the need to fight for recognition and approval. Feelings of low self-esteem can also result in more than usual attempts to seek approval. Explicit evidence for feelings of low self-esteem was found in thirteen of the eighteen interviews with addicted and in five of the interviews with compensatory buyers. Three compensatory and five utilitarian buyers indicated the desire to have more self-confidence in the self-discrepancy statements. This however was not an issue during the interview.

In the following, some examples are provided for each of the above listed factors. Voice is given once again to the addicted buyer. As life is often too complex to be put into preformed categories, the various factors described below are not necessarily exclusive and may overlap.

Approval seeking

And I spent years trying to make him feel the same about me and erm couldn't get him to er couldn't change him so er I used to do all these things (buying for the family). [...] I was constantly sort of trying to prove myself as a person in his eyes, instead of realizing I am a person in my own eyes.

It's a con really of yourself. You're conning yourself all the time. Yeah. If I do this (giving gifts to other people), then other people might like me. It was for other people all the time. It was about other people, lacking in confidence and everything.

I do want a compliment. Yeah. Oh yes at the very start yes. Compliments very much so. Because I've never had them. I mean [laughs] I still don't from my family so.

Approval seeking and freedom

I think it was an unsuitable way of dealing with a situation, which I should have confronted. Well my husband was, er, as I said erm I'm not saying I had no blame in this but he was a very difficult man and erm he used to be very unpleasant towards the children. And er, my way of dealing with it was to try erm and [coughs] and appease him and try and make sure the children didn't do anything to upset him and to get up at five o'clock, four o'clock in the morning myself and do cleaning and stuff to try and keep him okay. And I really should have er, you know, been assertive and erm said, you know, we weren't going to have this. *Interviewer: Mm. So how would the shopping help then?* Well, I think it was a bit of colour in a very drab life. It was a bit of freedom. It was a bit of space for myself and it was something for me and it just belonged to me. It was mine you know.

Approval seeking and sibling rivalry

Because he's never been there for us. Me especially. Erm as soon as I started having male friends or boyfriends or whatever, he just changed seemingly overnight, just didn't want to know. I could never do anything right and I still can't. [...] I could never understand why I did it because I cut myself and it hurts so much to do it. I mean there's not much skin on your arms and to cut through with a knife or razor blade, the pain was terrible. And I used to think I'm punishing him by doing it and then I wouldn't show him, I'd hide it. And then it'd heal up and I'd do it again. I don't do it now.

I stopped because, er, it wasn't having the desired effect. I think I somehow expected him to start caring about me again. He maintains that he does. You know, he says that he does. Sometimes he says he does but I find it so hard to believe. [...] What I did, I was always trying to win him over again, erm, I got all my O levels and A levels. I got all of them, everyone I went for, I passed them all. I didn't want them particularly. I did it to try and make my dad proud of me because my brother didn't get one. [...] He doesn't like books, he doesn't like to learn but he's very good with his hands. And my father was more proud of that than my achievements. He didn't care. And then I thought to myself afterwards: I should have failed more. I might have got erm a rise out of him then. But he wouldn't have helped me if I failed them all.

Approval seeking and inconsistent parental behaviour

I was and er desperately I suppose trying to get some show of affection for myself as a person off my mum. My mum mainly. My dad idolized me, I idolized him, and my mum was always jealous of that. [...] The only emotions I can say I experienced from my mum was anger and being told this is all your fault. [...] My mum used to buy me things to keep my mouth shut and I sort of used to feel guilty because I had pleasure in the things she bought me, erm, but also guilt because I knew what they were for.

Very often she (mother) had very black moods and just took to her bedroom and then came out and suddenly said it was my fault. I didn't even know what we'd done you know. Erm and then to overcome that perhaps we'd go into town or if I said I wanted something, I'd get it, you know. [...] So it was kind of a funny relationship. I felt anxious but was admiring her at the same time.

Education into incompetence, overprotection and overcontrolling influences

And er I didn't know how to boil an egg or anything because she'd never let me do anything around the place. The only thing I was allowed to do was dust my desk. I wasn't allowed to do anything else. Nothing whatsoever. So I had to teach myself everything from books and erm so on and so forth.

I was a very naive as, you know, when I see youngsters of today like my kids and like they're erm very much wiser than I was 'cos I wasn't allowed to go out into the world.

It was just not having confidence in myself to sort of think I can do this. A lot of things, I have noticed, that a lot of the things that I don't like doing are things where I'm relying on myself.

Overcontrolling influences

'Cos he was very possessive and erm didn't want us to separate. And several times over the years, you know, I tried to get a divorce and I got as far as seeing a solicitor. Well, once I got that far and erm after a few months by various means, you know, threatening and bullying and generally being unpleasant, he persuaded me to stop that [...] I suppose it (the buying) was to do with freedom again. [pause] That was me being me, you know, and doing what I wanted to do. Because the amount of freedom that I had to do what I wanted was limited I felt.

I still remember what I bought with my first paycheck. A Pink Floyd album, The Wall. I wanted to go out to spend money without any interference by my mother, nobody telling me what a rubbish I had just bought.

Suppression of feelings

And well, I suppressed them all because you don't tell anybody that at sixteen, you know. Well you don't. It's only recently that I've been able to talk about it. But er yes it must have had a marked effect on my life. *Interviewer: All these feelings of guilt, anger whatever that you experienced in your childhood, you weren't aware of it at all?* No.

Which is probably because of the show I put on, you know. As I was saying to you before, the hard exterior and that is so much like my father, erm, he'd never told us he loved us. [...] I don't think he realizes he's hurting me. Because, as I say, I put on a front and I think he thinks I'm just as hard as him. I'm not. [...] (He) worshipped, my fiancé, and the baby. Loved him. Erm and then when he when when my fiancé died, he was he was upset. But he he wouldn't show it. And I in turn thought, well, I can't show my grief and I kept mine hidden up, didn't let anyone see me cry.

It was my mum and she shouldn't act like that. Why does she act like that, you know, she's letting me down, letting my dad down. And sometimes you used to think why doesn't my dad say

something to her. [...] I'd think, well, how come I'm like that? She's nasty and horrible and I'll be cringing behind, never used to say anything.

Feelings of deprivation

I remember once when in junior school, there was a school disco and I didn't have anything to wear and a few people remarked about it and I never forgot, I never forgot. And I was really mad at my mum and dad. And erm I was about eight. Erm I was so angry and th+ I often think of it now because I thought to feel such anger and such hate at that age. I often thought I could have done murder. [...] It wasn't so much brand clothes I just didn't have anything nice to wear at all. The girls were in dresses, the boys were in smart pants and I didn't have any dresses. I was always in jeans, which I admit I was, but for this disco I did want a dress and she didn't get me one and I never forgave her, never. I always vowed to myself when I'm older I will have clothes, I'll have the best clothes possible and I did get them. I've got some fabulous dresses now.

I felt left out a lot because when the fathers used to come to parents' day and that my dad never came. Yeah I felt out, I felt left out at school.

And particularly my, I can remember my last year at school when I just had like one pair of jeans that I used to have washed one night to put back on the next day. And I think that when I got back out to when I went out to work that I just went mad. I just went the opposite. I'd had years of not having anything erm and I wouldn't say I wasn't, erm, I was spoilt in many ways but actually sort of money and material things, my parents couldn't afford to give me that. So I think I just thought: Right that's it. I'm going to have all those things now. I probably convinced myself that they were important. Erm and that's why, you know, the minute I started working I just spent everything on just on clothes, just to make probably to make me feel better.

In a number of the above statements the connection between the life experience of the buying addicts and their excessive buying habit is already apparent, for instance the experience that material goods are or can be a substitute for love, attention and recognition:

My mum used to buy me things to keep my mouth shut and I sort of used to feel guilty because I had pleasure in the things she bought me, erm, but also guilt because I knew what they were for.

..... and then (she) come out and suddenly said it was my fault. I didn't even know what we'd done, you know. Erm and then to overcome that perhaps we'd go into town or if I said I wanted something, I'd get it, you know.

I remember once when in junior school, there was a school disco and I didn't have anything to wear and a few people remarked about it and I never forgot,.....

In addition to the above mentioned association of buying with love and attention, shopping may also come to mean freedom and independence. This was especially the case if the respondents were subjected to overprotective and/or overcontrolling influences:

So we ended up with my mother and my dad, staying with them. And that sort of put pressure on. And I think it was my own way of getting heard, being independent by buying things. [...] I had a domineering mother. [...]. Everything was out of my hands. It was just bought and erm that was it. You had no say in the matter. Everything was bought through my mother. I lost confidence. [...] It was just that I wasn't good enough. I felt stupid and felt been made small....

Causing low levels of self-esteem is however not the only effect of overcontrolling and overprotective influences. Such influences can also impede individuals to mature

and to take responsibility for their lives. The following case of a male respondent in his early twenties is an example of this.

We had the phone cut off because I went down town and saw something that I liked, so I bought it. So we had the phone cut off. *Interviewer: So the phone bill wasn't important.* No. *Interviewer: Do you have any explanation why suddenly the item was so important?* Well, I mean, I'd go back next week the item might have gone but the phone would still be there, pay it. I mean [pause] I don't really use the phone that much, it's there or not. [...] And of course she (mother) couldn't get hold of us. I bumped into her in town and she said: Go and get the phone bill and let me have it. I'll write you a check. You know. We were reconnected on the same day. I mean 'cos she couldn't get hold of us.

Shopping for this respondent is an expression of independence, although the means for it are provided by his parents. When shopping, he can make autonomous decisions by choosing and buying things that suit his taste rather than his mother's preferences. Paying bills is generally not something he considers to be a liability. It would only take money away he would rather have to spend on something he personally can decide upon; in other words on something that is not externally determined.

And you get a seventy-eight pound gas bill, what have you got to show for that? Nothing. Except that you've still got gas in the house. [...] I mean, you spend eighty quid on the gas bill, I mean; I could spend eighty quid on something else. I could always find something else to spend the money on.

Another reason why shopping can come to mean freedom and independence is the experience that it is a way of getting out of the house, to escape from family responsibilities and pressures, and to do something for oneself. This association by itself of course does not yet lead to an addiction to buying, but it can explain why buying is chosen as a preferred compensation mechanism (cf. **Figure 6.2**).

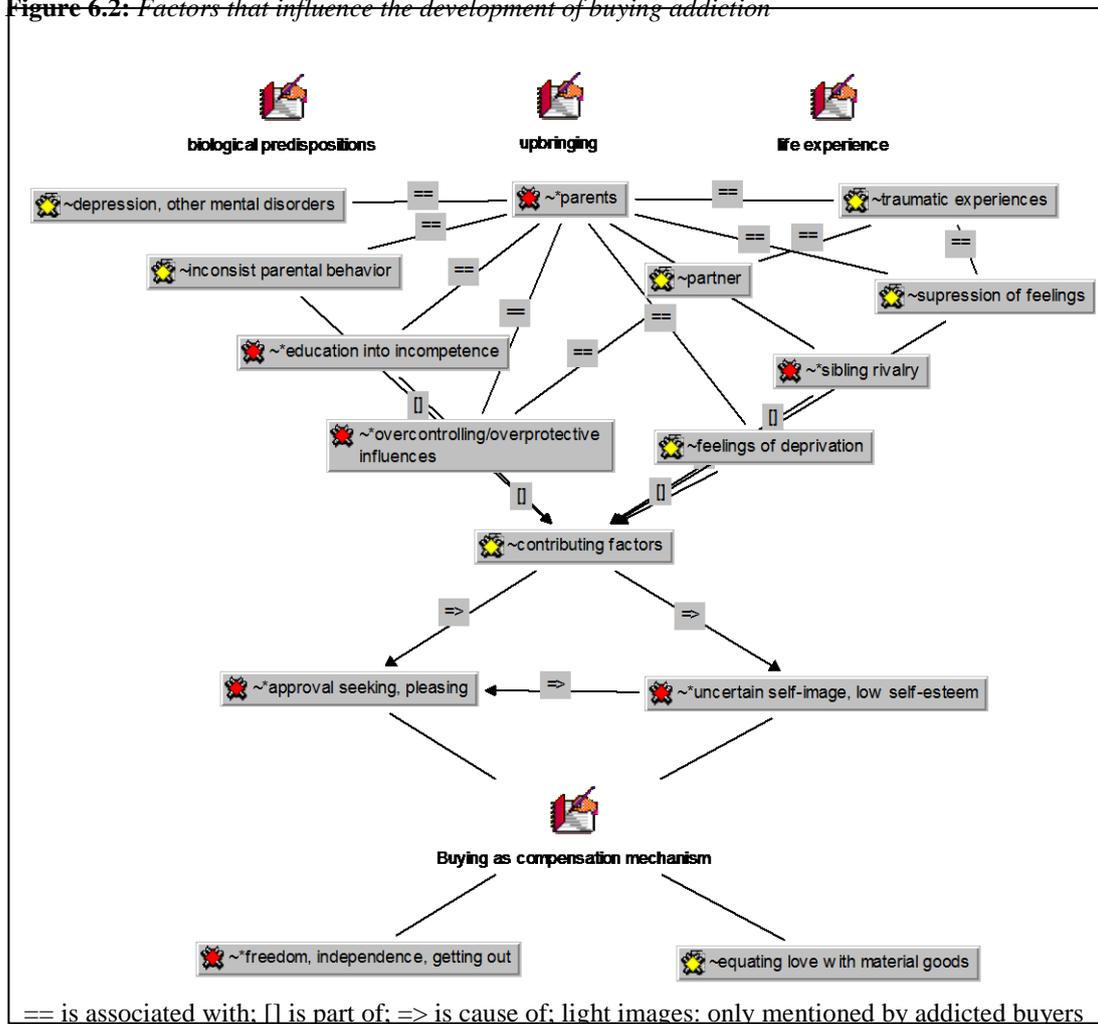
It's being able to be myself and not having to have to do anything at all, you know, as far as anyone else is concerned. That is part of it, being able to make the decisions, er, as to where one goes next, or does one not go anywhere else. It's freedom from pressure, I think.

I've been stuck in the house every day with the baby and [pause] it was about getting out the house. I'm just stuck in, day after day after day. Just getting us both ready, just getting out and [pause] buy something.

Just as an aside, the interviewed male respondents were much more likely to equate shopping with achievement rather than with freedom and independence, at least this was the preferred context within which they have chosen to describe their shopping experience. A shopping trip in the eyes of many male respondents has to be purposeful and has to result in a successful outcome, i.e., a purchase. Otherwise, it is considered a waste of time. Similar associations were previously reported by Campbell (1997) and Rook and Hoch (1985), see chapter 2.

In **Figure 6.2** on the next page, all experiences and their consequences that were found to contribute to the development of the addiction to buying are summarized. The top half of the figure lists all of the contributing factors like biological predispositions, certain experiences based on a person's upbringing and social environment, and traumatic encounters. The consequences of a repeated exposure to such experiences are feelings of low self-esteem and an increased tendency for approval seeking and pleasing, as presented in the lower half of the figure. One possible means of compensating for such feelings is buying. The reason why buying is chosen as the preferred compensation mechanism is related to the symbolism addicted buyers came to attach to shopping and buying, as shown at the bottom of the figure. In addition to the two presented meanings, there might be other ones, which however were not evident in the interviews.

Figure 6.2: Factors that influence the development of buying addiction



6.6 DREAMING ABOUT THE PERFECT SELF: A MOTIVE TO ENGAGE IN ADDICTIVE BUYING?

In chapter 3, it has been reported that both the enhancement of the self-concept and the maintenance of a positive self-evaluation have a high priority in every person's life. If dissonance occurs, e.g. if a gap is experienced between an actual and a desired state, self-affirming behaviour is triggered (Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988). From previous research on addictive buying behaviour we know that a) addicted buyers have lower levels of self-esteem and b) they have larger actual/ideal self-discrepancies than non-addicted consumers. Thus, they obviously are in greater need for self-affirming actions than other consumers. Above it has been proposed that addicted buyers might attempt to achieve a more balanced self-state by engaging in

consumption visions involving idealized images of the self, because consumption visions have been shown to generate positive affect (cf. Phillips, 1996). In the following, whether or not the interview data support this thesis is examined.

The data analysis showed that concrete idealized images were part of the addictive buying experience of eight of the eighteen interviewed addicted buyers. In the other ten interviews evidence for less concrete ideal images were found. Examples of less concrete images are: wanting to be more loved, more accepting of self, nice looking, smart, outgoing, more open to praise, more grounded, more assertive, more appreciated, less wanting to please other, more secure and in control of life, wanting to find out who one is and wanting to feel complete. These kinds of desires are also reflected in the concrete idealized images described by the other eight addicted buyers. Thus, most important seems to be the longing for an ideal self-state independent of whether this is expressed in form of consumption visions. The following cases illustrate this.

Case 8: The greatest wish of this respondent is to be an actress. The closest she has come to this dream is that she has an office job at a film studio. She got the job after having applied for it three times. Sometimes she has a role as an extra in a film. The kinds of items this respondent buys are also a reflection of this dream: make-up, often glamorous clothes and jewellery. She likes to dress up every day and looks down on people who prefer to wear jeans.

Well, I shall always say I wish I'd been an actress but erm it's a bit late now. I think that's the only thing I really would have liked to have been is an actress. Or anything creative but mostly being an actress. But I like interior design or drawing or painting or anything like that. [...] Well, I think it was always that I wanted to be on the other side, you know.

When I was a teenager it was mostly make-up (what I bought) then. And in the end, I ruined my skin 'cos I was wearing too much make-up, you know. But erm [pause] most of it was to do with, I wanted to be an actress and the make-up was all to do with the stage.

I was sort of better dressed er you know dressing above my station you know. Always trying to look like the stars. But, I'm not a star, you know. But I've always liked jewellery and it does make you feel more confident. [...] 'Cos you never know who you're going to meet. You might all of a sudden turn a corner and walk into a star, but it's very rarely. But erm you might accidentally walk into one.

Interviewer: So do you actually try to dress up because of that? Well, I always want to look as if I've got money, but I haven't got any money. [laughs]

Case 16: This respondent was brought up to believe that her destined role as a woman was to be a housewife and mother. She thought that this was what she wanted

to do and she lived her life accordingly, not quite knowing why she did not feel happy. She was dusting, cleaning the house, preparing the meals, being there for her kids and not doing anything for herself. She never went out because for her it was not the proper thing to do. Instead, she took care of her friend's children when they went out.

I was thinking then that's the way you just plod on then. And all those years in my life I was ha+ not happy, but I was 'cos I had what I wanted. What I thought I wanted then.

She tried to make herself feel better by 'improving' her household environment:

Er, 'cos when we bought the house that we lived in, erm for over fifteen years we lived there, I altered it about four times the rooms and things, you know. We knocked a bedroom into the bathroom, then we put it back. That was all a waste of money. And you probably do things like that 'cos you're unhappy. I think, I did.

I wanted to move and we couldn't sell the house. I didn't really like it and I thought by buying the kitchen it would cheer me up and I'd like the house. And after doing all that then I was still low. I wanted to move. Which we did [laughs] and the kitchen went with it. Yeah. That is er what I used to be like. *Interviewer: Mm. So why did you think the kitchen would help you or would help you to like the house?* Erm [pause], I don't know. 'Cos it altered a part of the house probably. I hoped then probably that it would help me to stay there and to like it. But I would have had to have changed the whole house to do that. [laughs]

The last few sentences illustrate how difficult it often is for the respondents to find out why they engage in excessive or seemingly irrational buying. This particular respondent has overcome her addiction, but she would have never achieved this by changing the house. The reason why she now no longer feels the urge to change things around in her environment is related to the fact that she started to do things for herself again. Her life now does not only revolve around being a housewife. She took up a hobby and she started to work. Dusting and cleaning are no longer priorities in her life. If she still were fixated on the belief that her role is to stay in the house, she very likely would also feel unhappy in the new house and would continue to find ways to make herself feel better.

Case 27: This interviewee expressed that her life was not very organized when she grew up. After she finally ran away from home in her teenage years, the striving for order and beauty became a priority.

I think I've got this vision of an ideal life, you know. I've got this vision of an ideal life where everything is very clean and very orderly. [...] My idea of a horror story is to be not very strong or even helpless and see everything deteriorate, actually getting dirtier and dirtier and more and more disordered. You know, that the converse of my ideal life.

Another dream of hers is to be a good woman, which in her eyes is to be the perfect housewife and mother. The respondent grew up during a time when the image of the ideal family was a working father, the breadwinner, and a wife who took care of the house and the family. Her buying resonates this dream:

I like very good kitchen equipment. I think, I've got this dream of an ideal life in an ideal kitchen and cooking lovely meals and you know.

At one time I had six vacuum cleaners. I used to collect vacuum cleaners. *Interviewer: Why was that?* I was looking for the perfect vacuum cleaner. [laughs] *Interviewer: So do you have the perfect one now?* I've got the two ultimates at the moment. I don't know how long it will last. I've got the erm what do they call it? Oh goodness me. Not Whirlpool. Something Cyclone. I've got an upright Cyclone. And er also because being like I am I've got to have the other one to do the carpets, do the walls and everything. [...] But at the same time I'm unwilling to part with the surplus one because there's nothing worse than a vacuum cleaner going wrong and it does happen. It gives me a feeling of security to feel that I have got this standby vacuum cleaner. [laughs]

In addition to household items, the excessive purchase of clothes is another manifestation of her striving for order and beauty:

You see, I've got this dream that I can get a wardrobe and I can get everything right and then I won't have to bother going out to buy clothes because they'll last. But this is a fantasy that I have, that I've tried to, erm you know, bring about several times. And I know it's a fantasy really you know. I have said over and over I don't need any clothes. I've got enough clothes now, you know.

Case 28: This case has some similarities with case 16, but in comparison this respondent did not idealize the housewife role. The outcome however was the same. Both respondents felt uncomfortable with themselves and thought that a change of environment would make all the difference:

It's like for other people clothes and stuff like that. But it wasn't, it was just like, don't know. It was a want. I needed to buy, you know, I'd see [coughs] a wallpaper shop, you know, a room in this paper. And all the fittings, the couch and the furniture. I visualize it then. Erm that is how I want my living room or bedroom. That's how I want it. And I felt comfortable in that environment when I was in that and I wanted to bring it home. So that's why I did it. *Interviewer: So did you actually feel comfortable then when you decorated it the same way as you have seen it?* I was comfortable. I felt comfortable, but it didn't last, did it. So I felt as though I would be satisfied. But I wouldn't and that's what I'm like with the furniture and things. I have to change things all the time. 'Cos I thought, if I changed things in my environment, everything else would be okay. [...] And then I didn't feel comfortable, so we had to strip it then and pick something else. And I'd go round and spend most of my time buying new paper.

Other manifestations of her buying addictions were to buy things for her husband, her children and the household, and to give gifts to people in order to make them like her. A possible reason why she felt the need to constantly re-decorate the house could be the fact that she hardly ever had anything that belonged to her. Throughout her upbringing her mother dominated her life and even after she got married, circumstances were such that she and her husband had to move back with her parents

for a number of years. Choosing the wallpaper and furniture might have been an expression of wanting to rule over at least one part of her life, namely the environment she was living in.

Case 41: The following is a very classic example, at least in terms of what journalists generally think addictive buying is. The respondent described her ideal image as follows:

I think, it was a sort of smartly dressed young trendy woman that you see around the places, can afford to wear designer labels and show them off and have Chanel make-up and that kind of thing. The sort of image that they portray sort of in the adverts. It was mainly the make-up stores in the big department store. And the way the girls are always so nice to you and you sort of thought, you know, and all around there's the pictures and the images. And that's seeing those started me off. It was the make-up I started off in first and then went on to the clothes. And the clothes I chose were like the clothes that were in the make-up adverts, you know. So I think it started really from that kind of image, you know. The sort of [pause], erm you know, the rich smart look kind of thing.

This interviewee was in her late teens when she tried to achieve this image via buying the appropriate accessories. She realized very soon that one cannot buy such an image and with the support of her parents she was able to sort out the financial mess she was caught up in. Her parents however did not bail her out. She had to sell everything she had bought and she also had to renounce a prize she had won:

And at that time I actually I'd won a competition. The first time in my life I'd won a television and I had to sell it. And that was awful. Worked myself you know. And the money just went straight to pay the debts and that was horrid.

Her insecurities did not suddenly go away because of this but she discovered other ways of making herself feel better. Over time, these other activities are likely to give her the confidence and independence she desires. Her buying problem thus very likely was part of the process of finding an identity. The fantasies she was living out when shopping were similar to the kinds of daydreams she had played out together with her girl friend when they were younger. Her shopping excesses possibly were an attempt to turn these dreams into reality; or as expressed in the terminology of Erikson (1976), to draw together the threads of her childhood identifications in order to form an independent identity. The period of excessive buying in her case was very likely just part of the trial and error path of finding ways to cope with life, one's personality and the maturation process more generally.

Case 43: Her family regarded the male as the superior gender. Her brother was encouraged to stay on at school and to receive higher qualifications. It did not matter what she was doing. Her brother's activities and achievements were always regarded more highly than hers. Being a housewife and mother for a number of years put her in a situation where she felt that she had to prove that she, nonetheless, was worth something:

I was feeling quite happy in the shops. I was [pause]. Sounds very stupid. One thing that used to go through my mind, I can remember, I remember thinking: Great, I'm buying this item. People think I've got money to buy clothes. I haven't really but people think I've got money to buy clothes. So I think, it was also a case of erm how I looked to society, [laughs] shall we say. You know and did I look like a weal+ not a wealthy person but somebody who could afford to buy clothes. *Interviewer:* *Did it give you a feeling of power or was it?* No, I think it was all me trying to say to people: I'm not only a housewife. I am somebody and I can go and buy myself these clothes and I can do this and I can just, I'm not only a housewife [laughs], you know. I think that's what it all came down to. Telling everybody that I'm not only, I am somebody.

The items she bought were related to the image she had in her mind of the kind of person who is *not only* a housewife:

The majority of the stuff that I bought was suitable for nights out. And anyone would think I'd have been going out every night of the week [laughs] to wear the stuff that I bought. So I, you know, I mean I'm lucky if I get out once a month. [laughs] So it's that sort of the situation. I just had loads of the stuff. [...] I think it must have been what I would like to have done. How I saw myself just without the kids [laughs] or whatever, without being only a housewife. Being able to go out always or doing whatever.

This respondent did not explicitly talk about the visions that occurred to her while in the shop, but it might have been similar to what another respondent reported:

And I was thinking: Yes, I can wear them for that when I go to such and such a place. I don't usually go to those places, but I think, when I buy them, I think, they will be great for that sort of event I may go to.

The above examples show that the ideal addicted buyers strive to achieve is always related to the fulfilment of an immaterial need. This ideal can be expressed in concrete images like the ones presented above, but this is not always the case. For some respondents buying is the equivalent to a drug, or as one respondent has expressed it: It is like the insulin for a diabetic. They have become so dependent on it that they respond to every disturbance in their life with buying (or alternatively with binge eating). They view it as the only way to relieve miserable feelings:

Sometimes, I don't know how to get through the day. I feel like getting into a car and driving it into a wall.

Instead, they take their credit cards and go shopping. The ideal self-state of these addicted buyers also is to feel better, but in their cases the immediate demand of the moment takes precedence over more elaborate ideal images. Engaging in consumption

visions thus is but one manifestation of addictive buying, albeit it seems more prevalent among addicted than non-addicted buyers. In comparison, none of the utilitarian buyers and four of the compensatory buyers made a connection between concrete or less concrete ideal self-images and their shopping behaviour.

In summary, when taking into account both concrete and less concrete ideal images, it can be stated that the interview data support the thesis that the addiction to buying is driven by the desire to achieve an ideal state. This ideal self-state however is often nothing more than just wanting to feel happy and to be content with oneself. Non-addicted consumers sometimes also engage in buying for this reason, however, they are in less of a need for self-affirming actions and they employ a larger variety of compensation mechanisms (cf. page 179). Ergo, they also report fewer disillusionment experiences due to buying than addicted buyers.

As discussed in chapter 4, attempts to satisfy immaterial needs through buying, like those reported by the addicted buyers, is an unsuccessful endeavour from the start. Material goods can never adequately satisfy such needs, even if the symbolism that is attached to consumer goods tells a different story: “I suppose, I felt being confident means wearing those clothes, the make-up.” From the theories presented in chapter 2, it can be derived that such associations very likely result in the experience of disillusionment. Empirical evidence for this proposition is provided by the interview data:

Yeah. Yeah. I think I thought clothes were going to give me confidence. [laughs]. *Interviewer: And they never did?* No, [laughs] no they didn't, no. [laughs] No. But you always think that they're going to when you're buying them.

I got no pleasure out of wearing them because they didn't achieve what I wanted to achieve and er there's been some odd times when I've thought: What the hell did I buy that thing for. [laughs]

I'd be cross because I'd spent money and not really gained anything. And also, not guilty just embarrass+ well ashamed in a way that you know I'd just spent that money for no apparent reason.

It just makes you feel better, doesn't it? [...] In the end, they don't. No. I mean, just got me into debt, debt, more debt.

I think a lot of it was I felt quite down. Erm sort of just wanted, yeah, not really knowing what the problem was and sort of thinking: I've really, you know, these things'll make me feel better. They'll, probably thinking, they'll make a change. But they don't, they don't do that. You sort of realize afterwards they don't make you any happier. [laughs]

I felt as though like people let me down, so I went for the material and thought that that would make me er feel happy. But it didn't. [laughs]

In total, fourteen addicted buyers have described experiences of disillusionment, whereas only three utilitarian and four compensatory buyers reported such

experiences. In addition, the disillusionment experiences of non-addicted buyers are less negative and less consequential than those of addicted buyers and mostly related to the purchase of a single item. As is obvious from the above statements, the addicted buyer's experience of disillusionment is in most cases related to their buying pattern as a whole. This shows that addicted buyers are not ignorant of the fact that buying is an inappropriate approach to make them feel better, but they have become so reliant on it that they can no longer anticipate more appropriate ways to make themselves feel better.

6.7 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS, CREDIT AND REGRET

From the interview data it can be derived that addicted buyers merely regard money as a means of relieving the compelling urge that is elicited by the need that they are trying to satisfy. Financial considerations like whether they are able to afford the item do not even enter their mind when buying:

I wouldn't consider my financial situation. I wouldn't even consider, it didn't enter my head that I shouldn't do it. [...] For that split second, you know, while you're choosing your purchase and your handing over your credit card, who cares.

...at the time I don't care that I'm getting it on credit or running up bills that I can't afford to pay. But afterwards even sometimes before I get home I think: Oh dear, you know. This is out of control now, stupid. I shouldn't have spent that money.

Because it was so easy just to get it on credit. And you don't really sort of think about it. Erm never really sat down and thought: Can I really afford it. That didn't even enter my mind. I thought: Oh it's just okay. I'll make do, or I'll cut down on something.

This however does not mean that all addicted buyers necessarily are bad managers of money and that, as a cure, one simply has to teach them how to budget and how to deal with their finances properly:

If I saw something I liked, I had to have it. Financial considerations didn't enter my head. I juggled around credit cards, figured out a way how I could buy it. I didn't think about the consequences. I was never good in saving money; I always had problems managing my own personal finances, even though I manage accounts professionally.

As is evident from the above statements, credit cards facilitate the addiction to buying. Another means that allows buying without having money at hand is catalogue shopping or parents who provide a constant cash flow. In all cases, there is no conscious reflection that one spends money that one does not have and that one has to pay it back one day. The denial of this fact can go as far as to consider one's available credit card balance as income:

I will one day have all my cards taken off me. I won't have an income of any kind.

I just no longer had money coming in. It was just a way of me getting money. I didn't think about how I was going to pay it off, but just (about) a way of getting money.

Compensatory buyers, similar to addictive buyers, are also less inclined to think about their financial situation when buying something on impulse and they are also more likely to put an impulse purchase on the credit card:

If I buy something on impulse I tend not to think about the money too much. If I see something I really wanted, I just think I want it; I'll go and buy it and then I kind of worry about the money afterwards.

I'll worry about the cost later. Not too much at the time. Have I got enough money? No, sod it I'll buy that. [...] As long as there's an available balance on my credit card.

They however would not buy big-ticket items on impulse and often they have developed personal rules up to which amount they allow themselves to spontaneously purchase something.

It wouldn't be anything over ten pound. You know, perhaps, as a push fifteen pound. Erm, that's the most I've ever bought on an impulse buy, not above fifteen pounds.

I never get into debt. I mean, I'm, I would never ever buy anything, erm, I never have and I never would, no matter how good it was, go into debt to buy something on impulse. Never.

Furthermore, compensatory buyers are able to limit their impulse buys if the situation requires it, and they try to avoid situations that would bring them into financial difficulties. In other words, they can forego an impulse buy.

As I say it doesn't happen so much now because we just haven't got the money

I did find that my impulse buying was worth then when I went to work 'cause the money was there. That's one of the reasons why I won't have a credit card because it's bad enough using a cheque book and balance it. But having a credit card is worse.

I had a credit card once but I just [pause] er put too much on it and decided to get rid of it. It was just too much. It's too easy to spend money like that.

I could impulse buy on virtually anything, but you have to be realistic and well - if this gonna cost 100 pounds, you know, you can't have it and you walk away. But em, you might walk away very slowly, em, but you've got to be realistic that you can't afford it.

Utilitarian buyers in contrast are rather levelheaded when it comes to buying something on the spur of the moment:

I probably wouldn't go shopping for things like to buy for myself unless I knew I had the money because I'd be too tempted to buy things when I didn't have the money to buy them. [laughs] So so erm yeah I mean I don't actually go shopping unless I know I've got the money to spend. I don't want to be tempted into spending money that I haven't got.

If you see something displayed er prominently that er you think you would like. And if I had the money, I suppose I would probably buy it. But, er, I don't think there's any other way that erm that I would buy on impulse.

I'm trying to think if I've ever gone out and bought something that cost a lot of money without having planned to do that.

The clear difference that exists between the three buyer groups with regard to their attitude to credit and money is obvious in the above quotes. According to general standards, addicted buyers appear to act completely irrationally when considering their usage of credit (cf. Faber and O'Guinn, 1988a). If one however takes into account why addicted buyers feel the urge to spend, namely to compensate for a depleted sense of self, it can be argued that their behaviour is not completely irrational. This can be explained by looking at some of the findings reported in chapter 4.

In chapter 4, it has been shown that individuals show a self-serving bias for everything that implicates the self. Maintaining self-integrity and protecting and enhancing the self belong to the main tasks of the self-concept. Thus, if the balance is disturbed, every individual will feel highly motivated to do something about it. As self-relevant urges are mostly emotionally loaded, other more rational considerations like "Can I afford to buy it?" are very easily overridden. A further aspect is that addicted buyers are more susceptible to the symbolic messages that are elicited by consumer goods (cf. d'Astous and Bellemare, 1989). Thus, they are more likely to employ a holistic rather than an analytic evaluation strategy. In other words, addicted buyers are less likely to start checking the main advantages and disadvantages of an item before buying it: Do I need it, what would I use it for, can I afford it, does it fit into other plans that I have, is it of good quality, is it the right size and colour, and is it really necessary to buy it? When shopping, the primary concern of the addicted buyer is to satisfy and/or to relieve a compelling urge. They just want to feel better about themselves, and the best way they can conceive of achieving this is through buying. Therefore, the act of engaging in buying can be quite rational, at least from the perspective of the addicted buyer.

This also explains why addicted buyers rarely regret the items they purchase. Below are a few responses given by addicted buyers to the question: Do you regret anything that you have bought on impulse?

Most of the regret comes [pause] at having spent the money because all the impulse purchases that I've made I really really wanted the item.

Yes, because they didn't achieve what I wanted them to achieve. So yes, I do, I suppose. Didn't need them. And they didn't achieve what I wanted to do. They just got me into more and more debt.

I regret buying all that which didn't involve my partner and doing things behind his back and carrying the thought of it around.

(I regret it because) I don't need them. In the sense of needing clothes, I do not need them. But as it seems inside I may need some and I don't know what that is.

(I regretted) loads of impulse things. Loads of them. Because I didn't wear them. Because they didn't look right. Because of bad feeling about them. All those sort of things.

If I think about all the money I've wasted, I mean, you could go out and buy a new car [...] and to think that I've wasted all that money. They didn't make me any happier, did they. But I mean what a waste, why did I do it?

A few years ago I did, yes. I didn't regret so much the item I bought but my buying behaviour. It got me in so much trouble. I feel much happier now that I don't do it any longer. My impulse buying today is much more controlled.

As is apparent from the responses, addicted buyers don't regret the items they purchase but they regret their overall buying pattern and its negative outcomes. One might also say that when addicted buyers look at their buying behaviour in its entirety conventional rational modes of thinking kick in again. In the heat of the moment, however, all such thoughts are suppressed because they would only hinder the addict from getting their "fix".

Non-addicted buyers also regret their impulse purchases at times, but the reasons for it are different. Compensatory buyers for instance either feel a bit guilty after buying something on impulse, or they regret the money they have spent, or they feel that they could have made a better decision when searching around a bit more. But usually, non-addicted buyers do not associate lasting negative feelings with their impulse purchases:

Like the trouble is I don't give it any thought and I don't [pause] you know, I did need the jumper but instead of, you know, instead of going round and looking at lots of different jumpers and finding one I really really liked, I just bought the first one that I saw I thought was okay.

No (I don't regret it). I might feel a little bit guilty when I come home erm but usually erm I don't. I might, as I say, I might feel a little bit guilty coming home but once I've got it home I think: Well, I've bought it now. That's it.

(I regret it) only 'cos of cash flow. I know it's only ten pounds but you know once again er that's another ten pounds I could have bought something else with. [...] Just been paid er so erm and we had a bit of a bonus this month, you know, with the profit-related pay thing. So I've got a bit more money this month than before, so big deal, it won't matter.

The reasons for regretting an impulse purchase mentioned by utilitarian buyers were almost exclusively not related to their own behaviour, but to the purchased item. The item either didn't perform as well as they had thought it would, or an item of clothing didn't look as good as was hoped, or the quality of the product was bad, etc. Considering that utilitarian buyers do not very frequently buy something on impulse, and also don't expect to always make the right decision, a few mistakes here and there

are tolerated. This can go as far as never regretting an impulse buy, even if the purchased item turns out to be unsuitable:

I am sure there must be loads. I did buy and when I regretted it, I took it back, I think [coughs] because I see it as a total waste of money if I don't. Erm 'cos I insist that anything I buy is the right thing and, you know, you can't always make the right decisions all the time. So but being able to take it back.

Oh yes, (I regret) quite a lot. The ones I regret most and most often are when you buy something and you think it is a good buy 'cos it's cheap or it looks cheap and you think that must be good value for money and then the quality is such that you can't really use it.

...yes, I have done. Clothes for example, sometimes I make a huge mistake. It is not quite as fashionable as I thought, they don't look as good as I thought.

I don't regret it [sigh] because I don't sort of shop a lot, it's quite nice to go out and spend some money.

Oh the regret. Yeah. Oh yeah. I have, have when I've bought things like stamps, but usually, I mean, I think the fun of impulse buying, I think, that cancels out any regrets.

The above presented examples already show that impulse purchases are not necessarily regretted. This becomes further evident if one also considers regret in the context of planned buying. A wide spread assumption within the academic community is that impulse purchases are irrational and economically not sound and that therefore regret occurs much more likely in the context of impulse buying.¹⁷ For example, Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) describe impulse purchases as purchases one would often not wish to have made following rational reflection. A frequently cited reference in this context is Rook (1987) who reported that 80% of impulse buyers describe negative consequences from their impulse purchases. It however is seldom pointed out that Rook also mentioned positive aspects of the impulse buying experience. A similar bias would be introduced if one only pointed out how often impulse purchases are regretted without considering the role of regret in planned buying by simply presupposing that planned purchases are regretted much less because they are bought after careful deliberation.

The present analysis disputes this assumption. The data show that planned buying does not fare much better than, or as good as impulse buying in terms of satisfaction with the purchased item. In **Table 6.5** the number of respondents that have expressed regret about their purchases, whether planned or on impulse, are presented.

Table 6.5: *Frequency of regretted impulse and planned purchases*

Regret	Impulse purchases	Planned purchases
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¹⁷ A notable exception is Wood (1998).

	yes	no	sometimes	yes	no	sometimes
Addicted	15	3	1	3	5	2*
Compensatory	3	9	6	3	9	6
Utilitarian	-	10	8	-	8	10

* As some of the addicted buyers never buy anything planned, the total doesn't add up to the total number of buying addicted respondents interviewed.

As discussed above, the large number of addicted buyers who regret their impulse purchases has little to do with the actual items they have bought. Rather, their regret is related to their overall buying pattern and thus is a symptom of the underlying problem that drives them to go shopping. More interesting for the present discussion is the result that both compensatory and utilitarian buyers regret impulse purchases almost as regularly as planned purchases. The reasons mentioned why a planned purchase is regretted were almost the same as the ones given for impulse purchases: money spent on something that wasn't quite right or didn't fulfil the expectations:

I regret buying the flat, the flat we bought [...] 'cos we're one of these people in negative equity.

Oh yeah. Lots of clothes. Planned things that you buy and then you kind of hate them and you can't take them back. I think, it happens to everybody really.

It turned out to be a less good product than I wanted and [pause] it was less expensive than some others and I was annoyed that my erm my first inclination to buy a better quality product had been overruled by myself, erm stupidly.

Some people also feel remorse for the fact that they needed to spend money on a necessity:

(I regret planned purchases) maybe more. If it is a planned purchase you have to buy it here and there. And it is annoying that you have to spend money on that if you could have used it somewhere else.

I regret planned purchases because it has taken money away that could have been used for an impulse buy.

Yet another reason for regretting planned purchases is that impulse purchases are more successful:

In the way of clothes, yeah. I had to buy a suit for a wedding recently. [...] The suit I bought I probably never wear again. [...] When I have to buy something under pressure like that, I do regret it. I find that much more difficult to shop. My impulse buys are much better.

...funnily enough it's the things that I feel I need rather than just indulgences. They're often the mistakes [pause].

I find if I've planned it, I invariably I cannot find what I want. Or when I do buy it, I think: Well I don't know. That wasn't quite what I wanted.

Thus, spontaneous buying decisions are not always worse than carefully planned acquisitions. They can even be better. A further indication that impulse buys may be better than their reputation is evident from the shopping diaries, which were kept by the interview participants for a period of one month prior to the interview. The task of the respondents was to take notes on their impulse purchases as soon as possible after the purchase.¹⁸ At the time of the interview the respondents were reminded of the impulse purchases they had entered into the diary and asked whether they regretted any of the purchased items. The results, presented in **Table 6.6**, show that almost none of the purchased items was regretted. Consumers just seem to make the odd mistake here and there, as was also true for planned buying.

Table 6.6: *Regret about most recent impulse purchases*

Regret	Most recent impulse purchases		
	yes ¹	no	no entries in shopping diary
Addicted	2	11	6 ²
Compensatory	4	12	2
Utilitarian	2	12	4

¹ The respondents regretted at least one of the items they had bought during the month they kept the diary.

² Some respondents who were classified as addicted buyers were actually recovering addicts and therefore they did not buy a single item on impulse during the entire month they kept the diary.

In summary, on the basis of the present data there is little ground for condemning impulse purchases. At times, even seemingly irrational behaviours like excessive impulse buying or frivolous credit card use can be rational, at least if one takes into account all parameters that determine a particular life situation.

6.8 OVERCOMING THE ADDICTION TO BUYING

In chapter 5, it has already been mentioned that taking away the means to spend, i.e. the credit cards, is not the right way to proceed if one really wants to help an addicted buyer. If buying is no longer an option to relieve uncomfortable feelings, binge eating is frequently chosen as the next best option (see also Faber, et al., 1995;

¹⁸ Examples of the shopping diaries can be found on the CD ROM at the beginning of the interview transcripts.

and Schlosser et al., 1994). The two behaviours quite literally seem to fulfil similar needs. They both give the feeling of filling the self (cf. page 182). Thus, taking away the means to spend is not very helpful in combating the problem. It may reduce the number of people who are addicted to buying, but as the underlying problem has not been solved, the afflicted individual will simply try to compensate via a different means. The following quotes show how important the ability to spend can become; simply taking away this mean will not solve anything:

He's (the therapist) it's cognitive but erm he's a psychologist. [...] And I went and saw him about this but I mean I've told him about shopping. He said, well, really, it's erm, relapse prevention, you know, where you don't take your cards in you don't take a cheque book, you take sort of five pound emergency money, so if you do go into town you haven't got money. So just, but if I see something, the way I am now, if I see something, what I would do is take the thing in tomorrow and buy it then. That to be, if I'm honest, that's what I would say.

I could not cut that card up. It was like cutting my wrist. [...] It's like losing; it's like cutting my toe off really. It's a lifeline. It is just like losing a part of me. God the thought of losing my credit cards. Erm, it terrifies me so much I usually keep one in my shoe, two in my purse, one locked home in a tin and my sister has one for me.

Medication is experienced by some as equally as useless as taking away the means to spend:

And then there's no point in me going to the doctor's 'cos they just put me back on the medication. Back on the Diazepam, Valium, whatever, to calm me down. [...] I felt that erm I was just existing from day to day and I was no good to my child at all. Erm that was it. I was just no good to my child as I was. So I threw the lot (down the toilet).

I was on Prozac. It is defeating the object, feeling on automatic, not with any body at all, but it stopped me spending.

If needed guidance is not provided, experiences with counselling can also be very disheartening:

Well, when I went to the doctor for depression, he got me to see a counsellor each week and, er, he seemed to make me think I should be content with what I've got.

Being content with what one has certainly is a noble goal, but if an individual is obviously very discontent with the current situation, then just giving her the advice to be more accepting of it without searching for the reasons behind it only seems to achieve that the patient is put off therapy. The following respondent had more luck with her therapist, but the cognitive approach her therapist applied wasn't able to reach into those areas of the self-concept that would have allowed her to recognize why she felt the need to buy:

(If I would sit here and tell myself): Just stop doing it. What's going to happen to you? What's the worst thing that could happen? That's what my therapist asked me. What's the worst thing that would happen to you if you stopped buying, if you didn't buy something tomorrow? And then rate that on a one-to-ten scale. But you can do that and I've done that, but you know, you can brush that.

No. [...] because having seen her for so long, she was my lifeline for so long. It was only her that understood, you know, and it was true. Erm, but I'm realizing now, as I have developed from there, that she's done all she can to help me. [...] She'll try and get me to answer it ('the why question') and I keep saying: I don't know. I still can't seem to come up with an answer.

As can be seen from the above statement, the respondent has no access to the need that she actually tries to satisfy. There seems to be no linkage between the need that drives her addiction and the contents of her consciousness that she can articulate (cf. section 5.3.3.1.1). The existence of such a corrupted linkage was also evident in other interviews. Addicted buyers often know that their buying is a symptom of something else, but as long as they don't know what the symptom stands for, they are unable to give up on their buying pattern.

I wonder why I buy those things. [...] It might be something that I feel I need.

... does it mean that there's something missing out of my life and I'm kind of I'm transferring it.

But I mean what a waste, why did I do it. It feels like that. Why did I do it? Why do I do it. Why, why did I? Why? [...] There must be a reason for it all.

In some cases, a good counsellor may be all that is needed to find an answer to the WHY question:

I was unaware of it until I've actually come back and sat back and and erm. 'Cos I had counselling, so it's made you more aware of things. [...] and then I went on a counselling course myself. And that helped me see a lot more clearly.

If counselling or psychotherapy does not help to find the desired answer, another approach that proved to be useful for one respondent was hypnosis:

...it was like I got to get a grip of this and I went for hypnosis. Mind you that itself cost me sixty-eight pound a session [laughs] so that was an expense. But she showed me why I did it. And I think once you know why you do it, it helps you. [...] It it was the one thing that erm made me admit to myself why I was doing it. And she got to me erm to the feelings I'd suppressed. And when she put me under I thought I'm not answering this. She said to me: It'll be your little finger for yes and your thumb for no. And I'm thinking: I'm not answering that question, I'm er I could not stop my finger from answering the question. So she got sort of down to my subconscious and erm and made me realize that I compensate erm and spend. [...] And er that's what the hypnosis did for me, it made me realize, you know, that I got to stop this constant struggle to get other people's approval and er just be happy with what I'd achieved myself. That's what got me to grips with my spending.

Realizing what one actually tries to achieve with buying does however not work like a magical cure. Overcoming the addiction is mostly a long and partly painful process: "*Interviewer: And then it took about seven years? Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, I've had numerous lapses....*" (see also page 211). Therefore, receiving some support and guidance during this process is very important. Which form of support is experienced as most helpful depends on the nature of the problem. If one has tried for years to gain the approval of one's spouse, then obviously one's spouse is not an appropriate source for support. Other sources may be a self-help group, which does

not necessarily have to be composed of buying addicts. As all addictions have a common root, sharing experiences with other recovering addicts can also be very helpful. The most important aspect of the recovering process is to restore the depleted sense of self, which is to gain self-respect and self-esteem built on inner strength.

... it's all about feeling worthwhile. [...] To learn to like myself because if you don't like yourself how can others, how can the rest of the world like you. And everybody is worthwhile. That was it, I'd had thirty-odd years of being told, not directly in words but in actions and deeds and things, that er I, you are worthless, you know, nobody's going to want you. Erm and I know now it's other people's insecurities, they put you down all the while. Mm. Since I started to realize I am worthwhile, I am a nice person, I am a good person and, erm, not perfect but learning to like yourself.... [laughs. sniffs] I'm lecturing now, aren't I. [laughs]

If I said now, right now that you know: Yes, I've been completely stupid. Oh God, you know, I'm useless you know. Oh Jesus I will never change. And that's er you know tomorrow [gasps] if I always feel so negative, you know, and judgmental and so hard towards myself, how am I going to accept myself? It wouldn't help at all. [...] There is no point in beating myself. It's all part of my make-up, (of who I am).

For the non-addicted person, the above may be an easy exercise. For the addict however it is a learning process that takes willpower in order not to fall back into one's old habits every time negative feelings are overpowering again. The above cited respondent who gained access to her suppressed emotions with the help of hypnosis aided her recovering process via the following means:

I used to erm cope with my depression (*which was a reaction to having stopped spending*) by going to bed Saturdays and Sundays. I was in bed stuck and I didn't want to get up. [laughs] [...] I used to go to bed and shut the world out, and erm better that way than the first way....

I've joined a walking group. (We have a) pub lunch when we go out. And on a Sunday, so there's no shops open. And this, if I'm not going on one of them, then I will do my cleaning in the morning and be in bed in the afternoon.

And erm and she gave me a tape as well to build my confidence 'cos that's where it all comes down to. But er I've had all my confidence in myself knocked out and she said any time you feel weak just put this on. And er at first I used it constantly 'cos I could feel myself slipping. [...] I've gained strength time one day at a time, you know.

And I think the best thing I ever did in that respect was erm I moved, when we, when we moved here we got this doctor. And er I went to him erm in a right state, up in there an hour crying and talking to him and telling him, you know. And he's a doctor who doesn't believe in doling out Valium and stuff like that. And he ran these classes, er relaxation classes [...]. And erm, I went to him, to these classes. Took myself off on my own, walked in, walked into a room full of people I didn't know, and erm he, er, he follows the Buddhist faith. Erm he talks to us and erm and that gave me a different insight into life and er how you get back what you give out and that sort of thing. I went there for about eight weeks and that did me a power of good. [...] I felt I didn't need to go any more so erm. As he said it would happen, you know. You will find your own strengths and erm, er, but you can come back any time you feel like you need to. But, er I haven't needed to yet at all.

The will to change and to overcome one's addiction can be related to a number of reasons. Most of the time, it is related to being faced with the reality that one has accumulated huge amounts of debt, or that one is about to jeopardize one's relationship or marriage due to one's spending habits.

One incident woke me up. We were planning to buy a new car and asked for a loan, through one of those loan offers you get in the mail. When we were refused, it frightened my life out of me. During the night I felt I was going white, I felt terrible, I was drained for three days.

...all the bills coming in and one thing after another and trying to push everything away and having to come to sort of terms with it. And then sort of having a bit of a breakdown and so I thought: Oh well. So then I had to face up to reality.

And that was the sort of thing I was doing. And so I was feeling really really guilty and then of course once he (husband) had started questioning about where I got it and when I got it and, you know, he knew that I'd had it a long time and bought it a long time, but it was his way of questioning me on it. It was a bad feeling between us.

I realized fairly early on that there was a problem erm but I didn't really know what to do about it. Erm I think the first time that I actually sort of really admitted that there was a problem was erm when we started to sort of hear about WalletWatch (a London based self-help group for addicted buyers). And er you know there was a TV program about it and I just thought: Ah, hang on a minute. This isn't something that's unique to me. This is you know widespread. Erm, but I hadn't really been able to talk to anybody else sort of family and friends about it.

When this turning point is reached, it then becomes important to have the proper support in finding an answer to the WHY question. What happens if one is forced to stop spending without receiving any support is illustrated by the following respondent:

Well it's like with catalogues. I've j+ I've got one at the moment. I used to have about ten, I think, coming through the door every day, catalogues. I am slowly [pause] getting better. [...] in shops, I'm totally out of control. But I mean I'm getting better. I mean I don't. I had to have everything at once really. Well er, I suppose I mean I'm not getting better. It's the fact that I know, I can't now because I've got so much in debt that I can't. I know, I can't. I think in a way. I suppose I'm not in total control so what I do in another two years' time (when the loan is paid off), [pause] don't know. I just don't want to get back to where I am now. If I get over the next two years, but it's a big if to me really. Will I get through the next two years. Just a matter of taking each day as it comes.

Thus, finding out what drives the addiction seems to be essential for overcoming it. As reported above, this may require competent professional help, but sometimes a hint in the right direction may be all that is needed to prepare the way out of the addiction:

...it's funny because it's actually something MX mentioned in one of his first letters. And [laughs] he knew, I don't know but I think that's true. Erm think it's 'cos I've always been the black sheep of the family, you know, erm I think I think that's what started it all from way back.

I read a book called "Free Yourself from Clutter", which I've still got (and) which has had a major influence on me, which is one of these popular, you know, you might call it popular psychology if you like but it's very very well written and it goes right to the root of things. Not just about physical clutter but it's about emotional clutter and all sorts of things. So I mean nothing gives me a bigger kick than getting rid of things these days. [laughs]

Some people also simply grow out of the addiction, e.g. in the process of finding their identity. This can be at a young age in the process of first forming an identity (cf. case 41 on page 197), or it can also occur at a later stage in life, if for instance a foreclosed identity was the main cause of the addiction (cf. section 3.5.2.3). In the process of achieving a personally acquired identity, the need to engage in the addictive behaviour may cease if the activities, behaviours and attitudes that make up

the new identity are experienced as more satisfactory and fulfilling. An example of this is the following case:

Erm possibly in the past four years, five years I haven't been so impulsive. *Interviewer: Mhm. Why is that?* Well I think as you grow older and you er I've started to work as well now.

Interviewer: So you erm [pause] so you were not so happy with your role as an ordinary housewife? No. Oh no. No. A lot of water's gone under the bridge. Twenty years now I've been married and before I used to have little part-time jobs, but I used to believe, well I yes I used to believe, I don't believe it now, that you had to stay home to bring up children and look after them. And er I didn't work because of the children. But er just over a year ago I started this job and I can't believe now why I didn't [pause] work before you know. And erm I always wanted to go to university and be a teacher.

Interviewer: Was it because you were brought up in the way that you're supposed to get married and have children and be there for them? Yes. Course it is. Course it is. It's the way you you were, I mean my mother was, er, still is, you know, sort of erm. Oh she'd be afraid of what the neighbours would say. Couldn't have a divorce. My God the neighbours would talk about you. And erm a bit of it rubs off. [...] My mother I mean, she tends on my father hand and foot. She takes his food in to him on a tray and takes it off his lap when he's finished. And because we're not like that she thinks that's terrible. See what I mean? Like when we had dishwashers she called us lazy and all the rest of it.

Interviewer: But you feel okay now? Definitely better. Definitely better. And I always used to say erm, as I told you earlier, that you should when you've got children you should be home with them. The first five years are the most important. And I think that's bull now. [laughs] After doing, after having done it, I think it's rubbish.

Interviewer: Mm. So there must have been like some point where you were fed up. I couldn't really say what day it was. No. It's just came probably over a period, isn't it. But I definitely feel now there's erm no going back. I couldn't just be like that again. I was thinking this morning, you know, if I didn't have a job now I'd go mad. Stuck in every day. Can't believe that I used to be like that

(I got married) far too young. Definitely. 'Cos you don't, I mean, I haven't had any life. You know you don't sort of do anything. You go from a father to a husband and it's the same thing. [...] (We) always had nice things. And so I think then it, that's the way you just plod on then. And all those years in my life I was ha+ not happy but I was. 'Cos I had what I wanted. What I thought I wanted then. And the kids were little and you think: Well, you've got to stick it. I never wanted to go out. I mean for years and years I didn't go anywhere. And about perhaps about eight years ago, I started going out and I met some people and we used to go once a week for a drink. And then you think, then don't you? What you've been, well, I did. What I've been missing. 'Cos I'd never done anything like that.

During the time the above respondent engaged in excessive buying (and also excessive eating), she was also not aware of the actual need she was trying to satisfy. She more or less found out by chance that other activities were fulfilling her more. Important was that she started to take responsibility for her own life without blaming others for her unhappiness. As another respondent expressed it:

And it's quite painful to come up against, you know, (that you are) responsible for the mess you're in. It's nobody else's fault. It's not your parentage or your upbringing. These things might have all predisposed (it), but i+ you've entirely got the responsibility here and now, you know, for what you've done.

A further important point is that overcoming the addiction is a *process* and not something that happens over night. This is a difficult learning task for all addicts

because not getting something instantaneously is the opposite of what they are used to. Up to the point where they decided or were forced to curb their spending, the search for instant gratification was ruling their lives. Below are a few excerpts from the respondents' descriptions of their experiences with the process of overcoming:

I can differentiate now between being in debt which I still still am. I'm I'm I'm slowly getting out of it but I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. And even though I've erm lapsed, they're not, you know, really really expensive (items).

I think that that I think that gradually it's a sort of positive and that I am sort of starting very slowly to move away from it. Erm but it's going to be a long, it's going to be a really long haul. And so it doesn't mean that it's not there and that I might not have days where I might sort of feel: Oh God, that's what I want to do. Erm, but it's not it's definitely not as bad as it was where every day I'd sort of be thinking: Oh I've got to get out to lunch and I've got to be, you know, and have a look round and all these different places.

But I don't have that horrible aching feeling about not having the things that I wish I could have and feeling awful 'cos I haven't got them and how am I going to cope without them. I don't have that anymore. [...] I (used to) just go round [pause] desperately wanting to spend. Sometimes that happens occasionally still, but I'm really disciplining myself now and I'm making sure that it doesn't happen. [...] Listening to the voices that start warning because they're there for a reason. [laughs] They're there to stop me spending.

When asked what it meant to them to be cured one day, two of the addicted buyers stated:

It would be a state where where, erm, you know, I would be sensible with money and erm have enough to get by and enough for little treats and enough to buy presents for friends without worrying.

I'd love to to be able to go out and erm not have any guilt about spending. And spending within my limits and not exceeding it.

Thus, the goal is to spend money just like a 'normal' person, to become a social consumer rather than to be a driven one, and most of all to be in control, not only with regard to one's spending habits:

Now, I have the strength to say: No, I'll wait. Er, maybe with a dress, mind you, I, you know, something affordable, twenty, thirty pounds, then I might, erm I might have it but, er, unless I've got the cash then no, I wouldn't. [...] All these years other people have had control of my life. I'm in control now and I'm getting my life how I want it.

6.9 SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to illustrate what addictive buying is like from the point of view of the addict. It has been shown that impulse and planned buying necessarily is not seen in the same way by all consumers. The emotional aspects of impulse buying are much more emphasized by addicted than by non-addicted buyers, and planned buying in most cases is seen by addicted buyers as an activity only other

people engage in. Their foremost concern is with improving their emotional self-state and this most often leaves no resources for other activities like planned buying.

It has become evident that addicted buyers mostly compensate for an unknown and often suppressed need. As discussed in chapter 4, if basic needs remain unsatisfied, individuals either seek compensation via sublimation or regress. Both of these possibilities were evident in the interviews. Metaphors like filling the empty self or buying comfort foods are an indication for a regression to the lowest level in the hierarchy of needs. Buying in those cases is used as an *ersatz* for the second and third level needs security, affection and belonging. An example for re-directing an unsatisfied need to a higher order need is the attempt of some addicted buyers to achieve order and beauty through buying, for instance to compensate for a lack of stability in life. None of the compensation strategies however was very successful because the underlying real need still remained unsatisfied. It has therefore been argued that in order to overcome the addiction, addicted buyers first need to find out what drives them to go shopping, i.e. which need they are actually trying to satisfy through buying. Because only then can it become possible to locate more gratifying ways to satisfy this need. Based on the interview data, a number of potential root causes that contribute to the development of the addiction to buying as well as a number of possibilities how to unearth the need that drives the addiction were presented.

Further, empirical evidence could be provided for some of the theoretical conceptions proposed in the previous chapters. These include the role of consumption visions and idealized images in addictive buying, the experience of disillusionment, and the existence of the corrupted linkage between the suppressed need that addicted buyers try to satisfy and the articulated contents of their consciousness. In addition, the proposed differentiation of consumers into three buyer groups based on the addictive buyer scale employed in the survey also proved to be meaningful in the interview context.

