

spotlight

newsletter

Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus • Fall 2006

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Pace University Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus

Services at the Counseling Center are confidential and available free of charge to members of the Pace community.

Our Pleasantville office is located in the Administration Center, 2nd floor, and our office is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Evening hours by appointment. Our White Plains office is available by appointment only.

Call us at (914) 773-3710 or drop in to make an appointment.

We also have Walk-In Clinic (no appointment needed) Monday through Friday, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m., in Pleasantville.

Going to Extremes: Identifying and Overcoming Addictions

Counseling is a process that helps people work out personal, academic, or vocational problems. The professional staff at the Counseling Center at Pace University is available to assist students, staff, and faculty in the resolution of these problems.

The Counseling Center offers: personal counseling, alcohol and other drug assessments and counseling, resources and support services for students with disabilities and victims of sexual assault, workshops and other programs, crisis intervention, and referrals to community and other programs.

In personal counseling, students discuss personal or emotional difficulties in complete confidentiality. Services include individual and group counseling.

Concerns discussed include adjustment to college, relationship and family issues, depression and/or anxiety, self-esteem, and eating concerns, to name a few.

As students experience the stress of university life, they often struggle to find balance in their lives. One consequence of this struggle is a tendency to overdo certain activities or behaviors, which often leads to addictive behaviors.

In this issue of our newsletter, we highlight some typical behaviors that students may do so often that they become addictive, including overuse of alcohol and other drugs and the Internet, as well as compulsive shopping and gambling. In highlighting these potential trouble spots, we also detail concrete trouble signs so students can assess when these behaviors have reached problematic levels. In addition, we offer information on why people go to extremes and how to curb these addictive behaviors. Finally, there are firsthand tips from current students on how to become involved in other activities at Pace University that will help promote your growth and development in more beneficial directions.

Most importantly, we hope that, through this newsletter, you will become more familiar with the many ways in which our Counseling Center can help students identify, understand, navigate, and work through their personal concerns in order to have a successful and fruitful academic and extracurricular career at Pace University.

Lauren Saler, PsyD

Senior Staff Psychologist, Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus

Ask Dr. Al Cohol: Spotlight on Overuse of Alcohol and Drugs

Dear Dr. Al Cohol,

I'm a freshman who's enjoying the freedom of coming to college and being closer to my friends. However, ever since I've gotten here, I've been smoking marijuana and drinking more. I'm having fun, but how do I know if I need to slow down? Signed, Partying at Pace



Continued inside

Ask Dr. Al Cohol: **continued from cover**

Dear Partying,

People use and overuse alcohol and other drugs for many reasons, including to feel more social, to feel more relaxed and confident, to have a better time, to avoid uncomfortable emotions, and to get to sleep. However, these short-term, temporary benefits carry with them longer-term costs that typically outweigh the benefits. These costs include detrimental effects on your health, your school performance, and your social and family life.

It's important to remember that you always have the choice to not use alcohol or drugs. However, if you choose to drink and/or use drugs, we hope you keep the following in mind:



Some Signs that Substance Use Is a Problem

- Being uncomfortable at occasions when alcohol and/or drugs are not available
- When you are not using, regretting things you said or did when you were using
- Arguments with friends or family related to your use
- Being able to handle larger and larger amounts of alcohol and/or drugs over time
- Increased work, family, school, and social problems
- Feeling angry or depressed while using or the next day
- Lying about substance use to friends and loved ones
- Neglecting people and events that don't involve substance use
- "Blackouts" or not remembering what happened when under the influence
- Uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms when not using (e.g., shakiness, fatigue, insomnia, irritability)
- Needing substances to cope with strong feelings, stress, and/or sleeplessness
- Wanting to cut back on use, but not being able to
- Driving a car while under the influence
- Getting in trouble at work or school for using (e.g., showing up late, calling in sick, getting fired)

Tips for Safer Drinking

- **Drink slowly**, don't gulp your drinks, avoid drinking games
- **Avoid using alcohol** along with other drugs
- **Set a limit** on how many drinks you are going to have and stick to it
- **Eat before you drink**, keep in mind that high protein foods help slow alcohol absorption into the bloodstream
- **Alternate** alcoholic with nonalcoholic drinks
- **Don't give in** if friends encourage you to drink more than you want to
- **Avoid putting your drink down** out of sight or accepting drinks from strangers
- **Plan ahead!** Designate a sober driver in advance, provide transportation at social gatherings where drinking is involved, or use public transportation
- **Plan activities** that don't involve drinking or drugs

Although these moderation tips are written to apply to the use of alcohol, you can easily adapt these ideas for drug use as well.

In addition, you can also always contact the Counseling Center if you or someone you care about has a problem with drugs and/or alcohol.

Paul Mikowski, PsyD

Postdoctoral Fellow, Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus

Ask Dr. Mike Rosoft: *Spotlight on Internet Addictions*

Dear Dr. Mike Rosoft: Help!

I've got a mountain of papers and studying to do, but I can't seem to stop playing video games on the Internet and instant messaging my friends. Do you have any suggestions on how to reduce my Internet use so I can get my work done?

Signed, Worried on the Web

Dear Worried,

Although the Internet can be an essential tool for college students, some people find it hard to cut back on their use or find that Internet use interferes with studying, work, and/or relationships. Most commonly,

people find themselves using the Internet too much to send instant messages, hang around on myspace.com, play video games, shop, look at pornography, or gamble. It sounds like you're a bit concerned about your time spent playing video games and instant messaging, but the warning signs and ways to help are similar for all online activities.

Following are some signs that your Internet use is excessive and some ideas for reducing your level of use.



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Some Signs that Internet Use Is a Problem

- Arguments with friends or family related to your Internet use (one of the best predictors of excessive Internet use is when someone mentions it to you)
- Finding yourself spending larger and larger amounts of time on the Internet
- Increased work, family, school, and social problems due to Internet use
- Feeling angry or depressed when you can't go online
- Lying about Internet use to friends and loved ones
- Neglecting people and events that don't involve the Internet
- Neglecting sleeping or meals because of your Internet use
- Using the Internet as an escape from strong feelings or stress
- Wanting to cut back on online time, but not being able to

- Buying things you can't afford on the Internet
- Feeling regret after a sexual experience involving the Internet (either pornography, cybersex, or meeting an online cybersex partner in real life)
- Getting in trouble at work or school for using the Internet (e.g., using the Internet at work for nonwork related activities)

Tips for Safer Internet Use

- **Acknowledge your use is creating problems in your life.** This is the first step. It is too easy to be in blissful denial of what you need to change.
- **Carefully define your problem.** What activities are you doing too much? What are the negative consequences? What other activities are you neglecting?
- **Restrict use to when you have a specific purpose.** Use the Internet only when you have a specific goal you've set ahead of time.
- **Set a time limit on your Internet use.** Stick to it by keeping a clock right next to your monitor. Almost everyone reports losing track of time on the Internet.

- **Plan a technology holiday.** Turn off the computer, cell phone, etc.
- **Schedule checking time.** Choose one or two set times a day to check your e-mail or myspace profile.
- **Exercise.** It has many benefits, and you can't be online while you exercise.
- **Talk to your friends and family about your excessive Internet use.** This promotes support, decreases shame, and eliminates secrecy.
- **Track your moods.** Watch for moods that lead to your Internet use, such as boredom, loneliness, or tiredness.
- **Look for other triggers.** These may include going online at the same time of day or other rituals.
- **Plan enjoyable activities that don't involve the Internet.**

Also, remember that the Counseling Center is available to help you or someone you care about who has a problem with their use of the Internet.

Paul Mikowski, PsyD, *Postdoctoral Fellow, Counseling and Personal Development Center Westchester Campus*

Confessions of a Shopaholic

I am a shopaholic. I'm constantly tempted to splurge on clothing, accessories, makeup, even cute odds and ends to decorate my room. I live for sample sales and can remember several shopping excursions where I swiped my credit cards till they begged for mercy.

It may sound silly, but compulsive shopping is a problem that a lot of people have. And unlike other problems people face, compulsive shopping is one that is not only misunderstood, but is condoned by our materialistic society. Psychologists estimate that 17 million Americans are shopaholics, calling the condition an impulse control disorder.

Contrary to popular belief, shopaholics are not always women. Studies show that both sexes can be impulsive shoppers. Women tend to splurge more on high fashion and beauty products, while men drop dollars on electronics and technology.

What should you or a concerned friend look out for when they think shopping has become a problem?

- **Regularly spending over your budget or income**
- **Compulsive buying.** For example, going in the store for one pair of shoes and coming out with ten
- **It's a chronic, continuous problem.** It's more than two or three months of the year, and more than a once-a-year Christmas spree
- **Hiding purchases or credit card receipts, bills, or accounts for fear of being criticized by others**
- **A vicious cycle of returning purchases because of guilt, which then triggers another shopping spree, another round of returns, and on and on**
- **Impaired relationships due to time**

spent away from loved ones to shop, covering up of debt with deception, and emotional and physical isolation as preoccupation with shopping intensifies

- **No longer being in control of shopping but shopping being in control of the person**
- **Shopping to cope with negative emotions.** Spending money as a result of feeling angry, depressed, anxious, or lonely, and then feeling a rush or euphoria when spending

If you recognize a shopping problem in either yourself or a friend, what can you do about it?

- **Take responsibility.** Admit that you are a compulsive spender, which is half the battle.
- **Leave your plastic at home.** Get rid of checkbooks and credit cards, which fuel the problem. Use cash if you do go shopping so you can actually see how much money you are spending.

- **Go with friends.** Don't shop by yourself. If you are with someone, you are much less likely to spend.
- **Shop only in stores.** Avoid online and catalog shopping as these methods make it way too easy to overspend.
- **Find other meaningful ways to spend time or to cope with difficult emotions**

Keep in mind that while behavior change is clearly crucial to recovery, so is reaching out for help. You may want to consider talking with a professional at our Counseling Center or elsewhere who can help you address your shopping habits.

Malikah J. Kelly, *Student Assistant, and Jennifer Page, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Counseling and Personal Development Center, Westchester Campus*

Famous Shopaholics

Imelda Marcos — former first lady of the Philippines whose wardrobe included 2,000 ball gowns and 1,500 pairs of shoes

Princess Diana — known for her impressive collection of clothing, antiques, and diamond jewelry

Elton John — raised \$615,000 for AIDS by selling some of the 15,000 suits that filled his closet

Why Do People Go to Extremes?

- People tend to go to extremes as a way to cope with upsetting internal emotions and/or external events.
- People overdo certain behaviors because they are feeling emotional pain, upset, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, and other troublesome emotions.
- Upsetting present and/or past events can also push someone to escape into extreme behaviors. Recent upsetting events might be a relationship break up, death of a loved one, and/or family problems. Past experiences that affect people in the present may be abuse or mistreatment, loss, and/or other upsetting circumstances.
- People who come from families with a history of addictive behaviors, like substance abuse or gambling, are at higher risk and more vulnerable to addictions themselves.
- Going to extremes may provide short-term relief but it also tends to lead to longer-term problems; these behaviors are poor and temporary solutions, which then get in the way of finding better ways to cope.

Lauren Saler, PsyD, Senior Staff Psychologist,
Counseling and Personal Development Center,
Westchester Campus

The Hidden Addiction: Quick Facts about Gambling

- The increase in legalized gambling has led to an increase in people who struggle with gambling problems.
- Young adults have a higher rate of gambling problems than the general adult population.
- Signs of a gambling problem include:
 - A preoccupation or craving to gamble
 - Being unable to stop gambling once you start
 - Spending more and more money in order to get the same “high” from gambling
 - Lying about the frequency of your gambling or the extent of your losses
 - Neglecting work, family, and school responsibilities
 - Being unable to stop gambling despite negative consequences
 - Having to borrow money to pay off your gambling debts

For more information on how to get help for a gambling problem, contact our Counseling Center and/or www.gamblersanonymous.com.

Lauren Saler, PsyD, Senior Staff Psychologist,
Counseling and Personal Development Center,
Westchester Campus

Extreme Makeover: Ways to Get Involved at Pace

There are many ways to get involved at Pace, avoid extremes and promote your growth and development in beneficial ways.

Top Five Ways to Get Involved

- 1) **Join an honor society.** There are numerous honor societies, most of which also function as academic clubs, and they are open to students regardless of major.
- 2) **Check out Pace’s media groups.** Media groups offer more than just the fun of a social club; they also provide valuable skills and experiences that can be used in the future and offer the opportunity for students to earn tuition reimbursement. Pace’s media includes the *Paw Print* newspaper; *Vox*, the award-winning literary magazine; *Legend Yearbook*, and WPAW radio station.
- 3) **Contribute to the community.** The Center for Community Outreach provides numerous volunteer opportunities for students, from beach clean-up trips to political action lobby days.
- 4) **Celebrate the Centennial.** Fall 2006 marks Pace’s 100-year anniversary and the fun kicks off early in the fall semester with exciting ways to celebrate Pace’s history.
- 5) **Gear up for University Fest.** The Student Development and Campus Activities (SDCA) office starts the semester with “40 Days and 40 Nights”—a celebration of the beginning of the new semester which offers different programs every day (and night) from the day classes start and culminating with University Fest.

To find out about all the clubs on campus and other ways to make this semester your best, make sure you attend the University Club and Organization Fair the first week in September.

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