

# **Compulsive Buying**

**Clinical Foundations and Treatment**



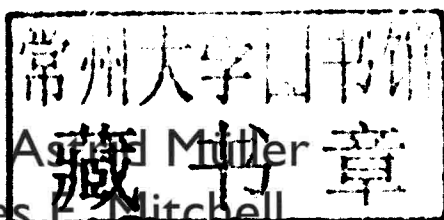
**Edited by Astrid Müller  
and James E. Mitchell**



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# **Compulsive Buying**

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# Dedication

To Steffen and Karen  
Who are always there for us

## Preface

We have had an interest in the problem of compulsive buying for several years. James originally became interested in it about 18 years ago when he was on the faculty of University of Minnesota. He had seen several patients with this problem and developed a cognitive behavioral intervention that he piloted on a few groups, modifying the manual in the process. He then moved to the Neuropsychiatric Research Institute (NRI) 14 years ago and put the project on hold.

Several years ago Martina de Zwaan from the University of Erlangen in Germany came to NRI as a visiting scientist to work with James and the rest of the staff on eating disorders and obesity research. She was there for a little more than a year. At that time James had again activated research in this area and was conducting groups. Martina ran some of these groups as well. This work resulted in the first published trial comparing the outcomes of those treated in the group to a waiting list control group. When Martina returned to Erlangen she carried this new interest in compulsive buying with her, and Astrid, her colleague in Erlangen, became interested in the problem as well. They then translated the manual into German and did a replication study in the form of a randomized controlled trial. Astrid then came to NRI for a year and worked with James and others on several projects, one of which was a new compulsive buying treatment study that is still in progress. She also did several other studies in the area including a large population-based prevalence study in Germany. All of this work will be reviewed in this text.

Astrid, Martina, and James published the manual as well as a literature review in German under the title “Pathologisches Kaufen” (Deutscher Ärzte-Verlag) in 2008. Astrid and James subsequently decided it would

be important to publish an extended version that included a review of all that was known about compulsive buying as well as an updated manual in English. James had previously edited a book for Routledge titled *Bariatric Surgery: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals*. At that time he had worked with an editor there, George Zimmar, and had found working with George was a great experience. George is a very thoughtful, very well-read and enthusiastic man. James had lunch with him at the American Psychiatric Association meeting in San Francisco in May of 2009 and proposed this book. Following an exchange of e-mails over the next few months it was decided to move forward with the project and that Astrid and James would serve as editors.

It was our pleasure to include as chapter authors a number of people who have done some of the most important work in this area. James had known Ron Faber when he was at the University of Minnesota. Ron had developed the screening instrument most widely used in diagnosing compulsive buying and had published some of the important early work in this area. Don Black, from the University of Iowa, also agreed to be involved. Don had been publishing important work in this area for many years and was kind enough to join the project. Gerhard Raab, who is an expert in neuroeconomics, agreed to contribute, as did our colleague Martina de Zwaan. Kristine Steffen, who works with James, contributed an overview on pharmacological treatment. Laurence Claes from Belgium had spent some time in North Dakota while Astrid was there and also became interested in this problem and began doing research on this issue with Astrid and Martina. Randy Frost, who is clearly the world's expert on hoarding behavior, also agreed to be involved, given the significant overlap of hoarding and compulsive buying. Several graduate students who worked with James, Joanna Marino, Troy Ertelt, Lisa Peterson, and Aimee Arikian, were also doing some research in this area and agreed to contribute. April Benson, who had written two books on the topic and practices in Manhattan, also contributed case material. Lastly, Nancy Ridgway and her colleagues, who recently developed an important new scale to measure compulsive buying, also agreed to contribute. In short, we were very pleased that we were able to put together a team of contributors who have been responsible for much of the important published research in this area.

The book is broken down into two sections. The first, "Clinical Foundations," reviews the available data from the literature and attempts to translate this into useful clinical information on topics ranging from diagnosis and epidemiology to the relationship with hoarding. The second section, "Treatment," begins with an overview of treatment principles and a series of case examples. Next is a therapist guide to the treatment manual as well as the compulsive buying group treatment manual itself. Individuals who purchase this manual are granted permission to reproduce the manual



as often as they wish for their clinical use. The manual is designed to be used as a group or individual manual, where both the patient(s) and the therapist have a copy. The patient's copy is his or hers to keep, as he or she is instructed to do the homework assignments in the manual itself.

Our main goal in publishing this work is to alert clinicians to this problem and to provide them with skills in the assessment and treatment of these patients. Our overarching concern is the dissemination of what we think is a useful treatment for patients with compulsive buying.

**Astrid Müller**  
**James E. Mitchell**

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank George Zimmar at Routledge for his kindness and enthusiastic support for this project.

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PART **1**

**Clinical Foundations**





# CHAPTER 1

## Diagnosis and Epidemiology of Compulsive Buying

RONALD J. FABER, PHD

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### Introduction

Compulsive buying (CB) is an often misunderstood disorder. Many people confuse it with impulse buying, excessive buying, and other more normal behaviors. While CB may share a number of behavioral characteristics with these other forms of purchasing, its causes, triggers, and outcomes differ in important ways.

Impulse buying is a common situation that almost everyone experiences at one time or another. It has been defined as occurring when our desire for a specific item outweighs our willpower to resist it (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). This may involve grabbing a candy bar or magazine while standing on the checkout line of the supermarket or seeing a beautiful coat and just “having to have it.” Generally, impulse buying is triggered by external stimuli such as the item or the store environment.