

**A STUDY OF REBECCA'S COMPULSIVE BUYING DISORDERS AS SEEN IN  
SOPHIE KINSELLA'S**

***THE SECRET DREAMWORLD OF SHOPAHOLIC***

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**ABSTRACT**

This study discusses about a novel written by Sophie Kinsella entitled *The Secret Dreamworld of Shopaholic*. The objective of this thesis is derived from the writer's curiosity to find out the factors which influence of the main character's illness named *Compulsive Buying Disorder* (CBD). There are three problems in this thesis. In order to answer the problems, a psychological approach is used because this thesis analyses one's psychological condition, its causal factor and its effect towards her relationship with other people. The first problem is to find the portrayal of Rebecca's CBD. In the analysis, Rebecca is portrayed as someone who shows more than four symptoms of CBD which means she suffers from CBD. The second problem is to discover the causes of Rebecca's CBD. There are some factors which influence Rebecca's CBD. Those factors are family, society, and media. The third problem is the effect of Rebecca's CBD towards her relationship with herself and her best – friend, Suze Cleath-Stuart. The study concludes that Rebecca suffers from *Compulsive Buying Disorder* (CBD) and the causal factors are influenced by materialism which focuses on the importance of possessions. As the effect, Rebecca's relationship with herself and other people especially Suze Cleath-Stuart is harmed because of her CBD.

Keyword: *Compulsive Buying Disorder, Psychoanalysis*

**A. INTRODUCTION**

In this era, we are surrounded by advertising that tells us that buying will make us happy. Some of us, there is an allure of wanting what everyone else seems to have. Elizabeth Hartney, an author of citation of *An Overview of Shopping Addiction* in [verywellmind.com](http://verywellmind.com), states, "Consumerism, by our own intentions or not (or some combination), has become a measure of social worth." CBD is a behavioural addiction that involves compulsive buying as a way to feel good and avoid negative feelings, such as anxiety and depression. Like other behavioural

addictions, CBD can take over as a preoccupation that leads to problems in other area of your life. (Koran, 2006:163).

Twenty centuries is the era when economy takes a major role in everybody's life. This phenomenon happens as a result of the increasing need of goods which people use to support their daily life. Consequently, people become dependent on the goods to support their life and start to focus on the importance of their possession. Daniel R. Fusfeled in *Economics Principles of Political Economic* states, "Buying and selling, trade, money, and credit become part of the everyday life of ordinary people, and money income determines one's welfare and status." (Fusfeled, 1998:59).

The consumerist lifestyle inclines to make people to purchase things that are not really important. This situation influences people to have a consumerist habit. However, this habit can develop into a chronic shopping behaviour that is included in the pyshological disorder. It is named *Compulsive Buying Disorders (CBD)*. CBD appropriate classifications is still debated because it can be linked to impulse disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder but based on the diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association it is categorized as an impulse-control disorder (Koran, 2003).

In reality, shopping addiction often results in substantial debt, legal issues, alienation from family and friends, and even marriage problems. What's more, studies show the co-presence of compulsive spending with other mental illness like depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Unlike those of us who buy things that we need, and things that we want to own, shopping addicts buy things for the euphoric feeling of spending itself. The process of browsing is highly stimulating. It will be bombarded with pages and pages of picture of desirable things. In the moment of purchase there is a strange driving excitement. However, we regret immediately, afterwards.

The importance of studying this topic is to show that literature sometimes reflects a certain topic that appears in a certain time. It happens because the author sometimes is influenced by an issue appearing in a particular time. Therefore, this thesis will study about CBD because it is an actual issue in this modern era and somewhat connected to each other. This thesis uses one of the shopaholic series: *The Secret Dreamworld of Shopaholic* because this novel portrays and the conflict of CBD in the twenty centuries. This novel shows the main character's, Rebecca Bloomwood, high level of shopping. Moreover, the writer wants to find the conflict when Rebecca Bloomwood dealing with her compulsive buying disorder and how it affects her relationship with other people.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

Based on the explanation above the thesis writer uses qualitative research to analyse the topic in order to make the thesis writer connect it with the topic easily through exploring issues, understanding the phenomena, and answering questions on the statement of the problems. While Bernard and Ryan (2003: 11) say that the goals of Qualitative research are to uncover and describe patterns and using the patterns to compare the differences between individuals and groups, and then to test assumptions about the patterns. The authors point out that qualitative data can include physical objects, media images, audio and files, and a range of textual material from the novel to brochures and advertisement. In short, qualitative research involves collecting and working with texts, images, or sounds. To analyse the novel the thesis writers combine two approaches. They are extrinsic and intrinsic approaches. The thesis writer chooses both of the approaches because of both of them are related to each other and each approach has its own goals in analysing literary work. The intrinsic approach represents literary work to be independent work. The intrinsic approach emphasizes literary work's concentration on the elements of literature such as character, theme, plot, symbol, figure of speech and etcetera. The extrinsic approach represents the concentration between the work with other fields of study such as sociology, economics, psychology, religion, and history.

The thesis writer decides to relate the study with a psychological approach. The goal of the psychological approach is to find out human's behaviour, attitude, and mentally based on one of the characters in the novel.

## **C. ANALYSIS**

### **1. The Portrayal of Rebecca's Compulsive Buying Disorder**

Rebecca Bloomwood is a 25 – year – old modern woman who has a big interest in fashion. She really likes to read fashion magazines since she was only teenager. Her fascination in fashion influences her to be obsessed with her physical appearance. She has a habit of itemizing what she is wearing, and always remembers what she wears in every occasion. She also plans the clothes, bags, and shoes she is going to wear before she goes out. It is seen in the following quotation:

I'm wearing my black skirt from French Connection, and a plain white T-shirt from Knickerbox, and a little angora cardigan which I got from M&S but looks like it might be Agnes b. And my new square-toed shoes from Hobbs...

It's a habit of mine, itemizing all the clothes I'm wearing, as though for a fashion page (Kinsella, 2000: 14)

It is seen that there is one thing that is very noticeable when she lists what she is wearing. It is that she always itemizes them by their brands. Exactly like the way that all fashion magazines do. Her obsession in fashion makes her want to work in a fashion magazine. She applies for job as a fashion editor to all fashion magazines but she is not accepted. So, she applies to a financial magazine who later hires her as a financial journalist where she writes articles on managing finance. However, she does not like working as a financial journalist. She only puts up with her job for the money, so she can still afford her desire of buying the fashion products in the store. It is seen in the quotation below.

This is what I do, by the way. I'm a journalist on a financial magazine. I'm paid to tell other people how to organize their money (Kinsella, 2000: 10)

I myself started on the catchily titled *Personal Investment Periodical*. I learned how to copy out a press release and nod at press conferences and ask questions that sounded as though. I knew what I was talking about.

After a year and a half – believe it or not – I was headhunted to *Successful Saving*. Of course, I still know nothing about finance. People at the bus stop know more about finance than me. Schoolchildren know more than me (Kinsella, 2000: 11)

It is seen that as a journalist, she never really writes an article by herself. She only goes to press conferences and asks questions to show that she understands about finance, but when it comes to writing the article, she only copies out the press release because she knows nothing about finance.

## **2. The Causes of Rebecca's Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD).**

### **a. Family**

There are many factors that are likely to cause one's CBD. Family can be the most important factor because it is generally known that family is the basic element in shaping child's personality. Children learn how to feel, how to think, and how to act by observing others in their home. They imitate what other people do. As the basic element, the condition of the family and how a child is growing can pretty much influence the child's personality. For this reason, family is analysed first (Parrott, 1998: 51).

Rebecca is the only child. Therefore, her parents give all their love and attention to her. She has been spoiled by her parents. She never has to work hard to get what she wants because her parents always give her everything that she wants. It is seen in the following quotation:

I grew up knowing that Mum and Dad thought I was the best thing in the whole wide world; knowing that they loved me, and always would, whatever I did (Kinsella 2000: 198)

“And you always get what you want,” she says. “Don’t you, Rebecca?” I feel my face flame. “Wh – what do you mean?”

“I mean you’re spoiled!” Her harsh voice cuts like a knife. “What you want, you get! Everything’s handed to you on a plate.” (Kinsella, 2000: 230)

“God, you’re right,” I say suddenly “I’ve been spoiled. My parents have always given me everything I’ve never.... Had to stand on my own two feet. Ever. I’ve always had people there for me.” (Kinsella, 2000: 342)

She knows that her parents will always love her and stand by her no matter what she does. For that reason, she is not afraid to get in any troubles or make mistake because she knows that her parents will always be there for her. Furthermore, when she gets into a trouble, her parents always try to help her ease the responsibility or even get away from it. As a result, she becomes very dependent on her parents to solve her problem. The fact that there will always be someone who will help her if she gets into a trouble, in the future, encourages her to use her credit card more. She has no worry in using her credit card because she knows that her parents will help her with her bills if her credit card is overdrawn.

## **b. Society**

In *Consumer Behavior*, Michael R. Solomon explains that materialism persuades people to buy things to match with the high-class standard. This is shown by buying famous branded things which are expensive, and the action of buying things to match up with materialistic lifestyle is called consumerism. Moreover, consumerism can affect in someone’s consumption behaviors and personality (Solomon, 1994: 296-442). Materialistic society values people based on their possessions and the cost of what they possess.

Besides family, friends can be a big influence in shaping one’s personality. Rebecca’s friends also have roles in the development of her CBD. Her friends at work are all business people who pay attention on appearance very much. Appearance is important to give a certain image. Rebecca’s colleagues always dress nicely. They are very stylish. She also has to dress nicely because she works among those people. For her colleagues, being stylish means wearing famous branded stuff from top to toe. This situation gives a motivation for Rebecca to wear famous branded stuff to fulfil her social need.

Rebecca is one of the people who live in a materialistic society. Besides seeing her mother as a role model in consumerist lifestyle, she is also only following the consumerist

lifestyle caused by materialism. Below is one of the reasons from the novel that Rebecca clearly states:

I mean, when you think about it, how much money do we all waste every day? No wonder I'm in a little bit of debt. And really, it's not my fault. I've merely been succumbing to the Western drag of materialism-which you have to have the strength of elephants to resist (Kinsella, 2000: 64).

It is evidently stated that Becky cannot resist the attraction of the materialistic lifestyle. She just simply follows the people surround her. She admits that it is really difficult to resist this lifestyle when everybody around her goes along with this way of living. She becomes a consumerist to fulfil her materialistic social life just like everybody else.

### **c. Media**

Rebecca likes reading fashion magazines. She gets the habit of itemizing what people wear from the fashion magazines that she reads. Magazines, especially fashion magazines, put pictures of models wearing the products that they promote as a kind of advertisement. They put good looking models wearing nice outfits and list the brands in the corner of the page (Kinsella, 2000: 23). As a reader, Rebecca wants to be able to look like those models in the fashion magazines. In the television, they have a program where a fashion expert is sent to the streets to stop some people and asks them to list what they are wearing. If those people wear a weird outfit, they will be humiliated in television. Becky does not want this to happen to her. She always checks out what she wears before she gets out of her apartment.

Accordingly, there is a method created in purchasing. It is called credit card. Credit card offers easiness for people to spend their money. Credit card tends to increase the addictive potential of shopping and spending because it encourages people to purchase and spend money now and worry about the responsibility later. Credit card is one of the reasons of Rebecca's CBD. Rebecca understands that she does not have enough money to support her shopping obsession, and credit card gives her the solution. It is seen in the following quotation:

I lie in bed staring up at the ceiling and, for the first time in months, calculating how much I owe to everybody. The bank, VISA, my Harvey Nichols card, my Debenhams card, my Fenwick card . . . (Kinsella, 2000: 40).

How could I have been so stupid? How could I have left my VISA card on my desk? What was I thinking of? (Kinsella, 2000: 20)

From the quotations above, it is seen that Rebecca can buy whatever she wants first and worry about the payment later. Credit card definitely persuades her to shop more and, therefore, makes her CBD worse.

Advertisements in magazines and television shows that are used to persuade consumers to buy things that the manufacturer tries to promote while credit card is a media to ease people in paying their purchases. These things are only making people to consume more and more. The same thing happens to Rebecca. She takes all what is offered to her and becomes obsessed.

### 3. **The Effect of Rebecca's CBD on Herself and Suze Cleath-Stuart**

#### **a. On herself**

Rebecca, as the main character of the novel shows that CBD as the negative things which can destroy herself. Because of her CBD, she gets a lot of negative effect. Rebecca as a compulsive buyer cannot live without credit card. She feels shaky when she does not get what she wants to buy. She feels that credit card is her life. When she knows the fact that her credit card is deactivate, she is getting angry. She feels that is not right. Below is the quotation:

‘What?’ I whip round in shock. How can my VISA card be no good? It’s my VISA card, for God’s sake. Accepted all over the world. What’s going on? It doesn’t make any sense. It doesn’t make any— (Kinsella, 2000: 234)

That quotation above shows that she is getting angry when she knows the fact that her credit card is being deactivated. She can not believe that she can not buy what she needs and what she wants.

‘I’m sorry, I’m afraid your account’s been frozen,’ says the assistant without lowering her voice. ‘I’m going to have to retain your card.’ I stare at her in disbelief, feeling my face prickling with shock. Behind me there’s an interested rustle as everybody hears this and starts nudging each other. (Kinsella, 2000: 235)

It is seen from the above quotation that she can’t handle herself even she knows that she has a lot of debt. She still buys everything what she wants and what she sees. She does not think that what she does it will destroy her slowly but sure. She will tell any lies for getting money used by her to buy what she wants.

#### **b. On Suze Cleath-Stuart**

Suze Cleath-Stuart is Becky’s best friend. She comes from a noble family. She owns a flat in Fulham that she and Becky live in. Suze owns the flat, but she does not want Becky to

compensate the rent. She only accepts Becky's check to pay the council tax bill. It is seen in the following quotation:

Her parents also bought her a flat in Fulham as a twenty – first birthday present and she's been living it in ever since, half working and half dossing about. (Kinsella, 2000: 34)  
 'Oh yeah, that reminds me,' say Suze. 'The council tax bill came in. it's three hundred each. Just write me a cheque or something.' (Kinsella, 2000: 39)

The quotation above shows that Suze also likes shopping but she does not have an illness like Becky. She can still control her interest in shopping. As Becky's best friend, she always supports her in every way. She always helps Becky whenever she needs help. When Becky has a financial problem, she helps her by lending money for Becky to pay Becky's bills. That is the reason why Rebecca loves to stay with Suze. Suze knows that Rebecca has a circle of life, she knows that Rebecca has her own life and she does not want to mix it and force her opinion or her life to Rebecca's life. It is seen in the following quotation:

This is why I love sharing a flat with Suze. She knows stuff like this, because she mixes in the right social circles. (Kinsella, 2000: 110)

Unfortunately, Suze, who has already spent almost a half of her life with Rebecca, a compulsive buyer. She feels worried if Rebecca stops or does not have any mood to shopping. It is seen in the following quotation:

Suze, I'm fine,' I say, thrusting her hand aside. 'Honestly. I'm just ... not in a shopping mood.' I hold a grey suit up against myself. 'What do you think of this?'  
 'Honestly, Bex, I'm worried about you,' says Suze, shaking her head. 'I think you should get yourself checked out. You're so ... different. It's frightening.' (Kinsella, 2000: 325)

It is clear that social life will have a big impact to the person who have CBD. Because Suze has a habit to see Rebecca shopping, she thinks that shopping is a usual thing which does not need to care about.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the writer tries to reveal Rebecca's CBD by analyzing her character. In brief, Rebecca has a problem in controlling her desire to shop. She gets a euphoric sensation when she buys something. She shops when feeling angry, disappointed or sad, she feels a rush of excitement when spending money, always pays with credit cards, feels down without her credit cards, feels guilty after wasting money, and has arguments because she lies about the amount of money she spends. She has financial problems as a result of this habit because she always pays with credit cards. She constantly lies to avoid the bills. It can be seen that Rebecca shows more than four



symptoms. She indeed suffers from a psychological illness called Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD). There are some reasons why Rebecca suffers from CBD. The first factor that most definitely causes Rebecca's CBD is caused by her family and friends. Rebecca is raised as a spoiled child. She gets everything that she wants, which, in the future, very much affects her acts in purchasing things and getting away from responsibilities. Apparently, her mother also has the same habit of buying needless items. Moreover, her best – friend, Suze give her the sense that she has to be level with them since they have fancy lifestyle. Another reason of Rebecca's CBD is the society. Each society has its own lifestyle and standards of living. Rebecca lives in London and New York which are huge cities and the center of trend. The society in those two cities has materialistic lifestyle and the people are consumerist. Rebecca is merely following the standard that the society creates. It is because she wants to be acknowledged and accepted by the society, which values people from their possessions, and those famous branded products that she purchases give her the prestige. The media, such as advertisements, TV programs and 'sale' promotions, also give Rebecca a huge influence because she cannot resist the offer that is promoted. Advertisements in magazines and television shows that are used to persuade consumers to buy things that the manufacturer tries to promote while credit card is a media to ease people in paying their purchases. These things are only making people to consume more and more. The same thing happens to Rebecca. She takes all what is offered to her and becomes obsessed. In her relationship with Suze Cleath-Stuart, Rebecca causes many problems because of her CBD. At first, she still thinks about other people but later she puts her CBD over everything. She does not care about other people as long as her craving for shopping is achieved. It is shown that Rebecca's CBD develops into a serious level.

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