

LIKE CARRIE BRADSHAW OF  
SEX AND THE CITY,  
MY SECRET ADDICTION WAS BUYING  
SHOES. GIVING AWAY  
MY STASH HELPED ME TO HEAL.

By Elise Seyfried

# GOODBYE, BIPOLAR SHOPPING

I was taking a shortcut through Bloomingdale's when I saw them: 4-inch heels in a jazzy floral pattern. I quickly tried them on and bought them. They were gorgeous, flattering and totally impractical. Perfect! As I left the store, I realized it was my third similar purchase that month. But since I was in the throes of an undiagnosed bipolar manic episode, it didn't faze me a bit. I drove home, already planning my next assault on the mall, and the next pair of fabulous shoes.

I only have two feet. But back then I had 60 shoes (30 per foot). For some

celebs and other high rollers, this may be a modest amount, but for most of the world it's ridiculously over the top. For me, shopping for shoes was a weird thrill in a year that took me from exultation to despair many times. And giving them away was a key to my recovery.

I was a minimalist when it came to footwear for most of my life. Oh, sure, I went through a stretch in middle school when I'd spend my babysitting money on sandals that laced up the leg tightly enough to cut off my circulation. But as I matured, my shoe collection grew smaller. By the time I was a young mom, I owned one pair of sneakers, one pair of heels and one pair of flip-flops. Period. I hated the act of entering a store so intensely that I would continue to wear shoes until they were falling apart.

"In my quest for sexy, opulent shoes, I found I was unable to stop myself from whipping out my credit card at every opportunity."



Now, suddenly, I was all about shoe shopping. I bought bright yellow kitten heels, grey suede pumps, purple slingbacks. But most of all, I bought stilettos: those 4- and 5-inch-high heels that look so sexy and hurt so badly to walk in. I'd hobble through an evening out in intense pain, but it was worth it to see the appreciative glances I was getting. (Or was this my imagination?)

When I finally got psychiatric help, and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I began to read about symptoms such

as compulsive spending. It all suddenly made sense. Over the next months, I was put on various medications until I found a combination that worked. I finally felt like my old self again, and reminders of my crazy year made me feel nauseated.

The 30 pairs of shoes were still lined up on a rack in my bedroom, only now I wasn't wearing them. Recalling the multiple foot blisters I had endured to look "extra" attractive, I was appalled. I was finding my way back home mentally, but the ridiculous display on

that shoe rack was keeping me from the next step in my recovery.

And so one day I called a nonprofit that collects dress shoes for women in need who are reentering the workforce. By the next afternoon, every pair had been picked up and were out of my life forever. I dismantled the shoe rack, and put it away. As time went by, I realized that by giving away my shoes, I was letting go of all of my shame about the worst year of my illness.

Today, 13 years down the road, I am back to owning just a few pairs of sensible shoes. But once in a while, I remember those floral spike heels from Bloomingdale's, and the manic, miserable woman who had worn them. I hope they are blessing someone else's feet now, and that she feels beautiful in them. For me, slipping into a pair of flats is a gesture of triumph: They fit me perfectly, and I pray they always will.

TODAY I CAN DRIVE BY A MALL WITHOUT CRINGING AT THE MEMORY OF MY SPENDING SPREES.



➡ If you tend to purchase things you don't need or can't afford, if buying things feels thrilling, if your closet is filled with tagged, unused items, you may suffer from a shopping addiction.

## GUILTY PLEASURES

➡ Practically everyone has a secret craving that they would be embarrassed to admit. This may be either a substance or activity that releases endorphins in the body, boosting happiness and relieving stress. Do you indulge in any of these common guilty pleasures?



**FOOD** Savory. Greasy. Salty. Sweet. Sometimes a person can't stop thinking about that favorite food—even if they've already eaten, and their body feels full. If they see it anywhere in the vicinity, they are guaranteed to wind up eating way too much and then disposing of the evidence. Indulging in a food craving can bring a rush of endorphins and temporary pleasure. But people often feel guilty afterward or try to make excuses for why it's OK to eat their food of choice just this one time. While most of these individuals have weak self-control when it comes to denying their food craving, others might have a genuine eating disorder and need to seek the help of a professional.

**CHOCOLATE** Is that sweet tooth tingling? Go ahead and reach for some dark chocolate. Dark chocolate contains higher amounts of cocoa, a major source of antioxidants, and less sugar than milk chocolate or white chocolate. As a result, a small amount of dark chocolate can be healthy for you. It reduces the chance of heart disease, lowers the "bad" LDL cholesterol, and helps protect the skin from the sun. Be aware that any type of chocolate will have a high fat content and calorie count, so consume in moderation to reap the benefits without health consequences.



**COFFEE** Some people start every morning with a cup of freshly brewed coffee. They revel in the rich, roasted aroma and the instant buzz they feel from the caffeine. A little goes a long way, however, as the body can quickly grow dependent on caffeine. Too much coffee can make someone jittery, disrupt their sleep and increase irritability and anxiety.

**TEA** People tout the many health benefits of tea, such as producing antioxidants that can help burn fat, improve cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of stroke and cancer. While it contains less caffeine than coffee, drinking large quantities can still increase anxiety and restlessness, cause headaches and dizziness, and make it difficult to get a good night's sleep.



**EXERCISE** Most people exercise regularly for their health: to manage their weight, increase their physical strength, improve longevity, protect against illness and keep their brain sharp. However, a small subset may develop a dangerous obsession with working out and looking good, which tends to go hand in hand with body image disorders. These individuals may exercise excessively to the point of injury, even when they want to stop. They may try to hide their guilty habit from friends and family. If these signs sound familiar, it may be time to slow down and reassess how to be physically active without resorting to harmful exercise behaviors.

—Davia Sills

