

Afflictions of the soul

Some addictions are more unusual than others

dition is an interesting thing. There are common addictions — cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, sex — but those are not nearly as fascinating as the great number of truly unusual addictions.

We all have at least one. We are all subject to our quirks, our little obsessions and routines we cannot live without.

I had a friend once who was addicted to sleep. At one point in her life, she was getting 14 hours of sleep a day and still feeling tired.

I have another friend who is actually trying to become an insomniac. He feels he wastes too much time sleeping. He likes to say, "Sleep when you're dead." You could say he's addicted to being awake.

A girl I worked with started drinking a cup of apple cider vinegar every morning because she heard it would increase her metabolism and help her lose weight. After awhile, she found that if she forgot to drink it, her body would crave it later in the day. That's a strange addiction.

I have my own habits. My worst is my dependence on my own self-righteousness. I don't watch television, I don't wear trendy clothes, I don't own a cell phone and I have an infatuation with deploring those who do.

In fact, I can hardly look at a person

wearing a name brand, carrying a pager or scrutinizing his or her reflection in the mirror without experiencing some sick twinge of superiority.

I tell myself that I respect everyone's right to choose how he or she acts and appears, and then I get off on my own silent criticism of certain choices that seem to me superficial or conformist.

I suppose I am justified, to a very small degree. Conformity, trendiness and enslavement to modern technology do reek of shallowness, materialism and weakness of spirit. But my inability to identify with those who choose to conform, who choose to be trendy, truly should prevent me from passing judgment on them so quickly.

Nevertheless, I cannot stop, try as I may. But don't think this addiction doesn't have its side effects. I suffer from my disgusting habit.

I have known, for instance, a small number of people who can be comfortable in any social setting. They make friends and acquaintances easily within any circle of people and they are generally well-liked. Humans can recognize open-mindedness very quickly in each other, and perhaps for that reason my friendships are confined to a very specific category — people

who are like me.

They are not like me in that we dress similarly, or are necessarily all of the same race or sexual preference, but rather we make it a point to stress our uniqueness, largely through our appearances.

It also makes me something of a hypocrite, which to me is one of the severest titles you can bestow on a person. To deem someone superficial merely based on his or her appearance is an incidence of hypocrisy at its subtle finest.

I suppose I could break myself of this hateful condition if I genuinely made the effort.

But like the smoker who continues to puff knowing that it is slowly eating away at his health, his vitality and certainly not benefiting those around him, I continue my routine, for reasons I cannot identify.

Those of you who are in that lucky class that do not know the need to judge, be glad for it.

Make use of it. And those of you who are in the class that has been the object

of my condemnation, we should talk. I honestly want to know why those flared jeans and all that make-up are so important to you.

And those of you who are victims of one of those almighty common addictions, take heart.

There are far more subtle afflictions with far more devastating consequences.

They are afflictions not of the body, but of the soul.

• Lindsey Clouse Kentucky Kernel (U. Kentucky), U-WIRE

Why finishing my degree makes me feel like Michael Myers is after me

The new school year is quickly approaching, and I can't help but feel a little depressed at the prospect. Sure, after four months vacation, the burnout I felt during final exams has disappeared. I've got some money in the bank, which almost covers this year's tuition. My courses have been chosen, and I've bought new school supplies and clothing for the fall.

But depression lingers. My mind wanders back to how much reading I did last year; how many essays I had to write, and how many tutorials I had to attend. I remember how many times I went to the library, and how many truck loads of books I lugged home in my knapsack. I think to myself: "how the hell can I do that again?!" Then doubt clouds my mind. A new thought forms: "I don't know if I can do it again."

And on top of doubt, there's fear. I am one year closer to launching my career. Suddenly, I will be forced to attend Career Centre lectures about resumes, cover letters, and proper interview techniques. I will worry about whether I will be able to perform my job adequately and whether I will be successful. But I

always get ahead of myself — whoever said I would be employed in the first place? Perhaps if I were trained in computer science or business I would be more confident about finishing school, but I'll have an arts degree! How terrifying.

Sure, I've seen the UofT ad in the paper that reassures us liberal arts students that there are great opportunities for those with a BA. A U of T English graduate is now the President of the Bank of Montreal, the ad boasts. I think the ad could entice high school students to attend U of T rather than attend college, which statistics show are becoming increasingly popular, but the ad only saddened me. Yes: I can write essays, read, and study for exams. But it seems as though the only job description that requires those skills is "student".

I know I will miss checking the box that says "student" under the heading of "occupation" when I fill out credit card application forms. When I say I am a student, it means I'm safe, with either OSAP or family to take care of me. When I check "student" it means that the big decisions are still being made for me by

higher powers. Sure, I get to pick my courses, but there is much security in knowing there are grade levels through which I must logically progress, and higher institutions to attend. After I've completed my university degree, it seems that the path I've traveled all these years will just disappear, or taper off. And at that point, as a university graduate, I will be forced to confront the fact that there is no predetermined next stage. I will be left to fend for myself.

So despite the exciting sales on school supplies and despite the boredom that sets in after four months as a working girl, I can't exactly say I'm eager to start the new school year. Frankly, I'm scared to go back to school. But as I begin what is possibly my last year at U of T the idea of becoming a professor grows on me. After all, it would require perhaps another decade before I could attain my Masters and PhD, and I could be able to spend the rest of my career in university, writing essays, attending tutorials, and lugging books.

• Erin Silver, The Varsity, University of Toronto

If school not in top 50 it's not fair compensation for the University President to be in top 10

U.S. News & World Report released its ever-controversial rankings again last Friday much to the dismay of students at George Washington University. For yet another year, the school has fallen short of the goal of obtaining a respectable ranking. In light of the promises of administrators and the amount students and their families shell out each year for the "privilege" to attend GW, slipping out of the top 50 schools is a disgrace.

George Washington is one of the most expensive schools in the nation. Estimated tuition and expenses hover around \$36,000 US. And what do students get for this money? New buildings, yes. Respect in a national publication? Well, not exactly.

How difficult would it be for GW to increase its stature in what has become a widely recognized who's who of American universities? The solutions do not appear very difficult at all. The most obvious improvement would be to shave a few percentage points off GW's 49 percent acceptance rate. GW already has too many students for the current facilities. By all accounts, eliminating a few would be a good thing. And if the admissions office cut a few students in the lower reaches of our SAT profile, so much the better, as that would also improve the University's ranking.

But what about per-student spending? GW is known more for its willingness to extract as much money as possible per student and have it disappear into a

bloated bureaucracy rather than recycle that cash back into student programs. Fixing this problem, too, would boost the University's stature.

GW's freshman-to-sophomore retention rate last year improved drastically over the past year, reaching 92 percent. But our graduation rates leave much more to be desired. Graduating less than 80 percent of our students over six years is not an accomplishment to celebrate. The University must do more to keep students here and on track. Reducing the ludicrous cost of attendance would be a logical first step.

Overcrowded classrooms and underpaid faculty only hurt GW, as well. If the University insists on charging students so much, then why do professors make so little? Cuts should start at the top. The University president's compensation package is ranked in the top 10, yet GW is not. There is glaring inconsistency here.

GW President Trachtenberg does not find the rankings "an ultimately very useful document" — at least not this year. In 1997 the University printed buttons that read "GW is 46th." Apparently the rankings' usefulness depends upon GW's position in them.

Rather than criticize the system of ranking colleges and universities, GW administrators should work harder to improve the University's status. The U.S. News college ranking issue is the best-selling edition of the magazine every year. A great many prospective students pay attention to what the magazine has to say. Perhaps the University should, too.

• Staff Editorial, The GW Hatchet, (George Washington U.), (U-WIRE)

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