

Hard habit to break

Students with obsessive compulsive disorder cope with rough rituals

By Crystal Dobson
THE BATTALION

Double-checking to verify car headlights are turned off may seem normal to students. Worrying about it all night in bed, however, is not.

This behavior pattern is referred to as obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD.

Some may not be aware of those around them who have been diagnosed with OCD. Some patients do not think of the disorder as a big deal, so they may not bring up the topic. Ashley Pauley, a freshman psychology major, said she tries not to make a scene with her OCD.

"I usually don't even think about the disorder, so my friends don't know the extent of it," Pauley said. "I take medicine which helps the symptoms, and without the medicine, they can become worse with age."

The Obsessive Compulsive Foundation described OCD as a particular thought the brain gets ahold of and cannot let go. Obsession-compulsion is a combination of thoughts that cannot escape the mind, except through repetitive compulsions performed by the person according to certain "rules." The rituals performed are an attempt to escape the discomfort caused by the obsessions.

Pauley said she does not know what motives are behind her actions and she cannot prevent them.

"I am obsessed with cleanliness," Pauley said. "I cannot stand residue on my hands, so I constantly find myself washing my hands with scalding water, to kill the germs more. It is hard for me to touch animals, and something as simple as peeling an orange would drive me crazy from all the residue it causes."

Pauley said she has other compulsions she

cannot control.

"I am overly picky when it comes to food," she said. "I usually throw away refrigerated items after a week, in case it is spoiled; I cannot stand adding condiments such as salt and pepper, ketchup or mayonnaise to my food after it has been served. Also, if it's not prepared exactly the way I want it, I won't eat it."

OCD is usually curable. Clinical attention is necessary when the symptoms persist, cause distress or interfere with daily activities.

Pauley said her main compulsion is what takes up most of her time.

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"Every night I have certain rules and rituals I have to follow before I go to sleep," Pauley said. "Washing my face a certain way, plucking my eyebrows a certain way, or even having my bed set up a certain way are a few things in my schedule for the night. It usually takes 30 minutes, if everything goes perfect. If things don't happen exactly right, I find myself losing sleep at night, either repeating the process or overly thinking about it."

Obsessive thoughts can interfere with the learning process. While sitting in class, a person with OCD may also experience concentration and attention problems.

The National Institute of Mental Health said the disorder is caused by low levels of chemical serotonin in the brain. There has yet to be a fool-proof proven cause.

Kathleen Blackwood, a sophomore business major, said everyone has certain obsessive compulsions.

"Everyone is compulsive in some way or another," Blackwood said. "When you were little,



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things like checking the bed for those green monsters every night can be considered compulsive. It helps people feel more in control, because they are controlling their own actions and nobody can stop them."

Approximately 1 in 50 American adults is diagnosed with OCD. Most people can be treated with clinical attention.

OCD usually goes unrecognized in people. The disorder needs attention when it takes up more than one hour a day of someone's time.

Ashley Arnold, a sophomore education major at Sam Houston State University, said people pick on her all the time for her compulsive habits. Arnold said she is obsessed with numbers.

"My alarm clock at night has to be set on a

number that ends in four, and when I buy gas, the price has to be ending in a multiple of 25," Arnold said. "No matter how hard I try not to be bothered by numbers, I cannot help it. Walking up the stairs, I constantly find myself counting, needing to end my step with an even number. Another habit I noticed the other day was subconsciously counting the number of cars that were the same as mine. I know I count other things without realizing it, and there's nothing I can do."

The Institute lists hand washing, checking one's surrounding, organizing, collecting and counting or repeating things more than the average person as the five most common obsessive-compulsive behaviors.

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