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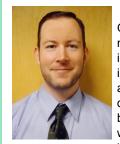
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<u>Research Corner</u>

Jayson L. Mystkowski, Ph.D.



Growing-up and going to college in cold climates has made me grateful for spending the last 17 years of my life in sunny Southern California. However, as a fair-skinned individual, I have had my share of unfortunate sunburns and now, as I get older, I have regular trips to the dermatologist to stay on top of "suspicious" spots on my body. I have always wished I could be a tanner, capable of worshipping the sun without layering myself in sunscreen, hiding under a hat and umbrella, as if a melanin-lacking

vampire. With this in mind, I was immediately drawn to a recent article that raised the possibility that "excessive tanning" might actually be an addiction.

Previously, researchers have considered excessive tanning as a symptom of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). However, recent evidence has found an elevated amount of hazardous drinking and drug abuse among those to who tan frequently (termed "tanning dependence," based on substance-related disorders in the DSM-IV). A modified questionnaire given to excessive tanners, taking items from OCD, BDD, and alcohol/drug abuse questionnaires, found some fascinating results. While the predicted relationship between excessive tanning and OCD/BDD was found, hazardous drinking was also shown to be significantly associated with tanning dependence (Lisham & Bonar, 2014).

Two different conclusions, which warrant further study, are as follows: there may be some individuals who engage in excessive tanning as a function of their obsessive thinking, to perhaps alleviate anxiety associated with their OCD; while, other tanning dependent individuals may be responding to an addictive craving. In either case, beyond doctors telling patients to be careful of excessive sun exposure, physicians may want to dig deeper to see if either of the aforementioned mechanisms are at play, in order to enhance a patient's motivation to change tanning behaviors, potentially with the inclusion of a qualified mental health professional.

Lisham, A., & Bonar, E. (2014). Tanning addiction and psychopathology: Further evaluation of anxiety disorders and substance abuse. Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, 70, 473-480.

Contact Us

435 N. Bedford Dr., Suite 407 Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Phone: (310) 858-3831

Email:<u>cbabeverlyhills@gmail.com</u>

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Our Staff

Joel L. Becker, Ph.D. Founder and Clinical Director of CBA & CBTI Clinical Professor, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA

Jayson L. Mystkowski, Ph.D. Associate Clinical Director, CBA Assistant Clinical Professor, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA

<u>Nancy Robbins, Ph.D.</u> Director, Pain Management and Eating Disorders Programs

<u>Pamela Elfenbaum, Ph.D.,</u> <u>M.P,H.</u> Clinical Psychologist

<u>Melissa Magaro, Ph.D.</u> Clinical Psychologist

Olivia Hsin, Ph.D. Clinical Psychologist

Denica Gordon-Mandel, <u>M.A., MSW</u> Clinical Psychologist

<u>Rusty A. Wiggs</u> Executive Administrator

<u>Gilberto Quiroz</u> Administrative Assistant