

The Social Constructions of Hoarding Behaviour:
Accumulation and Discard in Liquid Modern Consumer Society

by

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ABSTRACT

‘Hoarding’ has become a household term that refers to a high level of accumulated goods. This behaviour has been promoted as a social problem through medical and moral discourses. The recent inclusion of ‘hoarding disorder’ in the DSM-V solidifies an acceptance of hoarding as a mental health disease. Moral discourses promoted through reality television shows such as A&E’s *Hoarders* perpetuate ideologies about normal levels of cleanliness and organization, and promote hoarding intervention using professional organizers. Both framings of the problem focus on individual level behaviours while overlooking social structures. An analysis of hoarding behaviour that addresses changes in consumer culture and the advent of liquid modernity brings forth a new perspective of the behaviour as a problem. The contradictions between time and space reveal that hoarding may stem from changes in society. This allows for further consideration of the behaviour as a problem, and widens the potential for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Many people in North America today are familiar with the term 'hoarding'. Through the media and personal experiences this phenomenon of accumulation has entered mainstream culture as a social problem. Made even more popular through television shows such as A&E's "Hoarders" and TLC's "Hoarding: Buried Alive", hoarding has become a household word that indicates the most severe accumulation behaviours found in society. Recent medical epidemiological studies estimate 2-5% of the population of the United States may be hoarders, indicating a possible 15 million people affected (Mataix-Cols et al. 2010:559).

A general definition of the term 'hoarding' would indicate living spaces that are filled with junk or clutter, that are messy or dirty and generally unkempt. However, the term was more precisely defined when taken up by medical professionals. In 1996 psychologists Randy O. Frost and Tamara Hartl operationalized the term hoarding according to three specifications:

- (1) the acquisition of, and failure to discard a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value;
- (2) living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed; and
- (3) significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding. (Frost and Hartl 1996:341)

This definition of hoarding has since been used in numerous reports and studies on hoarding behaviour¹, however this has also prompted the behaviour of hoarding to be narrowly discussed within frames of medicalization and moral regulation. Where did

¹ See Frost and Steketee 1998; Maier 2004; Timpano et al 2009

these interpretations come from? Why do they consider hoarding to be problematic? And are they limiting our understanding of the behaviour we call hoarding? These types of questions have led me to begin questioning hoarding as it appears in society.

What is Hoarding?

Although a formal definition of hoarding exists, it fails to give a description of who a hoarder is and what they hoard. Not all characteristics are shared by every hoarder, and many hoard different objects in different ways for different reasons. The two major characteristics of hoarding are accumulation and the inability to discard; hoarders tend to accumulate at a high rate, but they are also unable to part with the items they come into contact with. This creates what we understand as a 'hoard': an abundance of goods packed into a living space that is too small to hold its contents; however, hoarders vary in what they accumulate and how they come to own their goods.

Hoarders accumulate goods in three ways: they buy them, they get them for free, or they accumulate them in their everyday practices. A hoarder may shop for new items from a store, or for used items in a thrift shop or at a garage sale. Some hoarders find items along the way at give-aways or in trash heaps or garbage dumpsters. Other hoarders accumulate during the practice of their daily lives; items they come into contact with on a regular basis are slowly accumulated until there is an abundance of them in the home.

How a hoarder accumulates depends a great deal on what they hoard. Items vary from new or used clothing to small collectables or figurines, to childhood favourites such as dolls or toys, to craft goods or spare parts, and even to basic trash. This also depends on the reason for their inability to discard the goods. Many hoarders accumulate with the intention of giving away the goods they get as gifts, but they never find the time to do so.

Some believe they are 'saving' the item from an early dumpster grave; they see value in items that most people do not see and they strive to reuse items as much as possible. This means that basic items that need a small amount of fixing could be kept, such as electronics, furniture, or small household appliances, but it can extend to items that could be repurposed: scraps of wood or metal or spare fabrics are kept because they can be crafted into something else. Other items are kept because they could be useful at a later time, including items like empty food containers or spare parts. Many hoarders keep things of sentimental value that have meaning or link to a memory of a loved one that has passed. Some hoarders do not want to part with their goods because they like the aesthetics of them. Others simply do not want to live in an empty house; they prefer the company of items to an empty room.

While some may suggest that a hoarder keeps worthless or valueless goods, it is important to remember that value is a subjective aspect of an object; although a hoarder's items may appear worthless to outsiders, they are often very valuable to the hoarder. In this case value is often not a result of monetary worth, although in many cases a hoarder believes their goods to be worth a lot more money than is actually the case. Instead the items hold sentimental value or aesthetic value, or are considered valuable because they are not yet obsolete or broken enough to be garbage.

It is important to remember that the extent of hoarding varies; not every hoarder fills all rooms in their living space with items to the roof. There are various extents of hoarding that exist, from a general growth of objects in a house to an overabundance of goods to a larger accumulation of goods that may inhibit daily living activities. The amount of goods in a room does not always determine whether or not the person is a

hoarder; it is the combination of activities and behaviours that suggests the presence of hoarding.²

Collecting

Many of the above traits seem like they could be indicative of several people, in particular those who collect items. Collectors are often known to accumulate many things that overflow the appropriate spaces in the house, and the items are often less valuable to outsiders than to the collector. However, there are several important differences between a collector and a hoarder. The biggest difference in the two is care of goods; a collector values their objects in a different way than a hoarder, and they want to keep them in very good condition. A hoarder is often more focused on the acquisition part of the process, and does not pay as much attention to the care of the items once they are present in the living space. This may occur to the point where the hoarder does not remove items from shopping bags or packaging because they lose interest in the item past the acquisition point. Care of goods also affects the amount of space dedicated to items; collectors have only as much space as will keep their collections clean and in good condition, while hoarders, who are less concerned with care of the goods, tend to keep their items everywhere in the home until the piles of goods impede their daily life. Other differences include what is collected. Although collectors may accumulate goods that others do not consider valuable, they generally collect a limited number of goods; they will have only one or two collections of goods, and when they shop they are very specific in what they are looking for. A hoarder however has several 'collections' of goods, and is more likely

² There has been a scale created to determine the extent of a hoard in five categories from low to severe, where the lowest indicates clutter problems and the highest indicates a severe hoard. It is used with a medical and moral discourse and suggests intervention practices. See *The ICD Clutter-Hoarding Scale 2011*

to accumulate an item on every outing, whether or not the purpose of the trip was to do so. Thus, the acquisition of goods also differs between the two. Lastly, collectors take pride in their collections, trying to show them off to company and visitors. Hoarders do not share their hoards, whether in the name of privacy or due to shame.

Accumulation and lack of discard

Although hoarders vary in the ways they obtain and keep items, their commonality is an increased rate of accumulation of goods paired with an inability to part with items at a regular or sustained rate. It is these two actions in combination that create a hoard; these actions occur frequently in society separately, but it is only when a person practices them at the same time that they may be considered a hoarder. These practices vary in several ways, but they all indicate a higher than normal rate of acquisition and a very low rate of discard. Interestingly, these actions are the only 'objective' indicators of hoarding behaviour; they exist in a description of hoarding behaviour without judgment or subjective interpretations. They also carry no value judgment inherently; any ideas of normality around accumulation or discard are constructed in a social frame.

Research Question

If the behaviours of accumulation and lack of discard are not inherently problematic, how is it that hoarding has come to be understood as social problem? I believe this is due to reasons of presentation; hoarding has been framed in certain ways as to promote it as a social problem. Medical professionals have approached the behaviour as a problem for several reasons, most recently advocating for 'hoarding disorder' as a mental disease. Moral advocates have approached hoarding as a behaviour that signals abnormality when it comes to cleanliness and organization, prompting regulation of the

behaviour through reality television and the creation of self-proclaimed professional organizers. Both of these approaches, however, frame the problem very narrowly, focusing on the individual as the sole perpetrator of the behaviour. Thus, the problem has never been considered within the context of changing social structures.

In this paper I advocate the study of the 'objective conditions' of hoarding behaviour alongside a subjective interpretation of what constitutes the 'problem' of hoarding. Actions of accumulation and the inability to discard reflect changing aspects of the consumption of objects. In attempting to understand these behaviours, consumer culture becomes an important frame because current culture is greatly influenced by consumerism. For this reason I choose to examine various consumer theories that aid in the explanation of the objective conditions of hoarding. I also advocate however for the positioning of hoarding behaviour within a liquid modern framework. This allows for a different interpretation of hoarding as a problem that examines the changes in space and time that may affect how people manage their daily interactions with objects.

Method

The various approaches to hoarding behaviour that currently exist require a form of organization to understand how and why they have become accepted in society. Social problem construction theory works well to disassemble the different components of the two current presentations of hoarding, medical and moral, and then to provide a path to the creation of a new perspective of hoarding behaviour that accounts for social structures. Throughout these analyses I emphasize the objective conditions of hoarding behaviour, accumulation and a lack of discard, alongside the subjective conditions that create the differing perspectives. The final construction of hoarding presents the behaviour

alongside that of consumer society and liquid modernity. I use these concepts to aid in a new perspective because they focus on social structures as opposed to individual actions. This construction leads me to question the classification of hoarding as a problematic behaviour, and opens up a new approach to the study of hoarding.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER THEORY

While investigating hoarding behaviour, I found that further interpretation required a consideration of consumer culture. Hoarding falls into the category of consumption; both medical and moral perspectives provide consideration for subjective aspects of hoarding, but the objective conditions of hoarding are behaviours of consumption. Thus, in my research I sought a theoretical framework that would inform the behaviours of hoarding rather than the individual and social reactions to it. Consumer theory provides insight into the historical development of consumer tendencies that help to explain how behaviours of accumulation and the inability to discard are developed and practiced in current society. This chapter will provide a brief presentation of some of the key ideas that consumer theory advocates.

Consumer theory is attuned to the historical progression of consumption, noting the changing nature of social forms under industrialization. It highlights the way in which interactions with objects have come to define our society as well as our selves. The following chapter will highlight differing perspectives on consumption, the cycle of needs and wants, the fetishistic traits of commodities, and the interactions between objects and people. All of these aspects are important in understanding the consumer society that we live in today. I provide these ideas in sequence from the modern to the post-modern period, highlighting trends and how they change. I end with the liquid modern period, a concept created to aid in the interpretation of today's quickly changing society.

MODERNITY

Although many authors advocate that postmodernism solidified the concept of consumer society, modernity had a great deal to do with the development of consumerism³. Following the enlightenment, modernity emphasized a change in the understanding of humans as independent and free actors within the social world (Slater 1997:9). A shift from religious to scientific thought assisted in the altering of institutional powers, as key ideas of freedom, reason, and progress permeated the social world (Slater 1997:35). These were the conditions under which industrialization developed and flourished.

Consumerism is linked to modernity for several reasons. The institutions, infrastructures, and practices of consumer culture originated in the early modern era; however consumer culture as a whole is tied up with the basic idea of modernity, wherein individuals are free rational beings continually in a state of flux (Slater 1997:9). Don Slater sees consumer culture as the “culmination of Fordist Mass Production coupled with Keynesian economic managerialism”, noting the coupling of affluence and self-destruction for which capitalism is now known (Slater 1997:9). A discussion on the key facets of modern consumer culture begins with an exploration of the notion of the commodity, a topic of focus for Karl Marx in the early industrial era. Commodity exchange is tied to consumerism, which leads to the beginnings of the concept of need versus want. These are manifested further in the mid-modern era when affluence and luxury enter into the commodity sphere. From there I discuss the progression of morality and desire in the consumer era, and the problem of false needs. I follow with an overview

³ Some authors debate that the consumer revolution predated industrialization, noting changing taste as a fuel for commodity production in the 1600's. See Slater 1997.

of advertising and planned obsolescence; although further developed in the postmodern era, both aspects have original foundations in the modern era that ties them to modern consumerism.

The Commodity

Karl Marx opens *Capital Volume One* [1867] with a description of the commodity as “an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another”(1967:43). The commodity and commodity exchange became the focus of Marx’s work, providing a theory of the growing economic system and its complications and contradictions.

The shift from early to late industrialization raised production levels and increased commodity exchange, creating a new level of affluence in everyday life. People were inclined to buy commodities that went beyond basic subsistence due to new levels of wealth. Although Marx identifies commodities by use and exchange-values that include standard labour amounts and working time, the commodity today is known for its allure and potential satisfaction stemming from human need or want. Modern consumer culture is thus characterized by the existence of commodities in everyday life.

Status

As commodities developed and profits increased, the onset of higher levels of wealth and consumption led to the development of luxury goods. Purchased with excess wealth, luxury items immediately became items of status that indicated class position, authority, and respectability. Thorstein Veblen wrote about conspicuous consumption and wealth emulation at the turn of the century. He believed the luxury commodity contributed to rising levels of material accumulation due to its use as a tool of status

display. Veblen used the term ‘pecuniary emulation’ to describe the process of continually buying objects that were newer or more expensive than what your peers or neighbours had; this was in attempt to solidify or improve status (Veblen 2003:17). The commodity today is still known for its link with ideas of status and wealth; although initially introduced as a sign of upper class status, the multiple classes of modernity still use commodities as signals of their membership in a group, or to try to initiate membership in a different group. Indeed, pecuniary emulation was only the beginning of a longstanding association of objects and status.

Commodity Fetishism

While a commodity is often described as a material object, Marx recognized it to be much more than that. Commodity fetishism became the concept that described how a commodity was not simply an object or a piece of labour but a relation between men/women (Marx 1967:67). In this Marx emphasized the social nature of the commodity, the way that no object could be considered on its own without considering other human beings that were a part of the relation. This concept of fetishism provides insight into how objects as commodities play a role in the relations of humans despite appearing as separate physical objects.

The Needs/Wants Debate

The onset of increased production and the availability of luxury goods generate changes in the needs and wants of consumers. The fine line between ‘needs’ of sustenance and ‘wants’ that may be dictated as social norms becomes less clear during this time. Several authors over the span of the century have entered into a debate on what true sustenance involves, which ‘wants’ may be confused for needs, and how social

forces play a role in that change. The obvious initiators of the shifts between needs and wants are corporations and the mass market, who in the name of profit strive to sell more products. But the system is complex in many facets, affected by issues including morality, desire, and satisfaction, which often results in high levels of accumulation.

Needs and morality

On the eve of the twentieth century Emile Durkheim was already thinking about the problem of increasing needs in society. He was concerned with the establishment and fulfillment of needs that were not based on the requirements for physical maintenance of life (Durkheim 2002:207). Non-physical human need is complex because it goes into the realm of free will; needs are no longer based on sustenance but instead on cultural norms according to what is accessible and available. Once taken out of the realm of natural sustenance, want that is confused for need can be destructive. For Durkheim, the amount of culturally dictated need or status emulated by a person was hard to determine without pre-existing moral barriers (Durkheim 2002:208). While physical or natural needs have obvious barriers relating primarily to food and shelter, material desire relies on limitations derived from moral thought. This becomes problematic in the modern era of industrialization: increasingly available wealth causes higher purchasing potential, while moral regulation is in decline due to lowered religious subscription and the further separation of church and state. This leaves the consumer dependent on his or her own free will for decision making. Durkheim believed that increasing wealth aroused a “spirit of rebellion which is the very source of immorality” (2002:215), pointing towards the onset of capitalism and the development of a deviant consumer society.

The needs/wants situation becomes more complex when human satisfaction is no longer rooted in moral order (Durkheim 2002:215). Durkheim believed that basic subsistence needs could always be satisfied in a moral way, but luxurious desire was harder to satisfy using moral means. This is due to the nature of need: sustenance needs are natural needs stemming from our existence as mammals and thus are fairly easily satisfied, whereas desires are fabricated and thus not natural, requiring that they are often satisfied unnaturally. If a need cannot be satisfied morally, it must not be a necessary need. The inability to satisfy a false need becomes impossible, which leads to more deviance due to declining levels of satisfaction. Less satisfaction creates more unhappiness, which begs more needs, and so the cycle continues. Durkheim thought affluence was tied with unhappiness, due to the inability to satisfy needs morally. He believed poverty could create the happiest society because it is the best cultivator of morality due to limited availability of material items. The affluence/happiness debate has thus become a popular topic in sociology, psychology, and economics.

The dependence effect

The problematic nature of non-physical needs is also commented on by John Kenneth Galbraith. He focuses on how satisfaction is a myth that leads to more need, creating a cycle. Similar to Durkheim, Galbraith notes that “when man has satisfied his physical needs, then psychologically grounded desires take over. These can never be satisfied or, in any case, no progress can be proved” (Galbraith 1976:119). Galbraith believes that the “urgency of desire is a function of the quantity of goods which the individual has available to satisfy that desire” (Galbraith 1967:120). By this he means that a person’s desire increases when the originally desired goods are obtained; the

satisfaction of a want begets more want. But he also comments that with increasingly available goods come decreasing returns on satisfaction while fulfilling desire. For Galbraith, the creation of new needs is rooted in the process of production. He claims “production only fills a void that it has itself created” (Galbraith 1967:127). The driving force behind production is to keep creating and fulfilling wants, which is made easier by the increasing levels of dissatisfaction. This he calls the ‘dependence effect’; the idea that an affluent society creates more wants by continually failing to fully satisfy the already existing wants (Galbraith 1967:131). This leaves the person with more and more goods but less satisfaction. This cycle is not created by individuals but is produced and maintained through advertising, whose job it is to create desire (Galbraith 1967:129). Galbraith also notes that needs are tied to status; higher levels of want and production create higher levels of accumulation in the name of prestige (Galbraith 1967:128). Thus, desire is also linked to the luxury commodity through ideas of status. This connects the commodity industry to the maintenance of a cyclical system of want creation and subsequently to declining levels of satisfaction and happiness.

False needs

Many members of the Frankfurt School, include Herbert Marcuse, later continue the debate on needs with the concept of ‘false needs’. Marcuse writes that false needs are those that are “superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression” (Marcuse 1964:4). Like other authors discussed, Marcuse believes only vital needs qualify for true needs, including physical needs such as nourishment, clothing, and shelter. He advocates that satisfaction of the physical needs must be met before any other needs, true or false, are met (Marcuse 1964:5).

For the Frankfurt school, needs are tied to exploitation and alienation stemming from Marx's theory of commodity exchange and the working day. Marcuse discusses how the commodity has become a tool within production to further alienate and control the worker while he/she consumes (Marcuse 2000:12). Marcuse believes the market dictates needs and thus influences cultural value. However, the values promoted through needs are ideologies that progress capitalism, such as high consumption and profit. Although modernism advocates ideas of freedom, modern consumers are actually trapped in consumer society; the idea of freedom only extends as far as the fabrications that exist. Choice is a myth; consumers may only choose from tools of alienation that the system of oppression has created. The cycle of capitalist exploitation thus reproduces itself within commodity goods; workers are controlled outside working hours by consumption in the name of surplus profit that benefits the capitalist and industry (Marcuse 2000:17).

The most interesting aspect about false needs is that they are satisfied falsely; consumer society creates desires that are unable to be fulfilled, thus ensuring continual purchasing practices among citizens. If the consumer is never satisfied, they will keep buying more goods. This cycle becomes more problematic when true needs are satisfied by false needs; basic needs of sustenance are never completely fulfilled, leaving a void that people continually try to fill with goods. As the system continues it becomes more apparent that need production is a factor of capitalist profit rather than actual human subsistence, highlighting the imbalance between need and consumption. (Slater 1997:125).

The needs/wants debate extends beyond what is provided here, but the above discussion allows for an understanding of the cyclical nature of consumer society.

Consumption is heavily tied up in recreating needs so as to encourage purchasing, yet the commodities provided are never enough to satisfy the consumer fully, prompting them to desire and buy more. This cycle is a major facet of increasing economic profit and thus sustaining consumerism. It also draws attention to the lack of freedom consumer society creates.

Advertising

Although advertising is more often associated with late modernity or postmodernity, it is actually tied up in progress during the industrial era. Increasing rates of production required higher levels of consumption, and advertising was found to correlate with higher yields of product sales for large companies. This was initially a response to over-production, but was soon found to be moneymaking strategy (Slater 1997:33). The ability to encourage desire for products through public space ads was at first unknown, but soon entirely exploited, as advertising became a part of people's daily lives.

The simple combination of words or pictures in a place available to the public had a bigger impact than imagined. It is in advertising that people began to notice new products that they believed would improve their lives or increase their status, thus making that object desirable. Due to the nature of advertising, companies could market several items successively, suggesting each one is better than the last. The new commodity is tied up with status, prompting the consumer to purchase it as soon as possible. Even if the product exists in a similar form already in possession, the idea of a new commodity and new status emulation often convinces the consumer to make the purchase anyway. This

way, advertising can put a claim on any item that it is ‘bigger, better, newer’, and the consumer will believe it to be a necessary item for daily living.

The power of advertising and the way big business ‘controls’ the consumer by way of marketing brings forth the concept of the cultural ‘dupe’ or ‘dope’. This is the idea that, no matter the product, whether it be similar to other products or perhaps even useless in its design, a consumer will buy it because an advertisement urged them to do so. This points to an understanding of corporations controlling the purchases of the consumer, and thus also controlling their desire. It pegs the consumer as an “irrational slave to trivial, materialistic desires” (Slater 1997:33) allowing for manipulation into mass conformity as dictated by a smaller group of more powerful people.

The idea of capitalist control is developed in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *The Culture Industry, Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (2002). They suggest that entertainment is only an extension of the working day in the name of surplus profit. Their emphasis is that all commodities and entertainments are made to be alike and only give the appearance of freedom without actually delivering it. This brings to mind the idea of the cultural dope who is unaware of the sameness of the commodity world. However, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest this characterization is false; they believe the consumer understands their lack of freedom, but accepts it because of the good feelings consumerism brings (2002:136). Later authors have also challenged the idea of the dope because it takes away all agency in consumer culture and suggests a complete lack of freedom in society, a rather pessimistic view of the current world. The manipulative ability of big business via advertising has been identified as potentially destructive,

despite continual acceptance of billboards and print ads in both the public and private spheres.

Planned Obsolescence

Stemming from the marketing revolution, planned obsolescence is a key aspect of maintaining high purchasing levels and ensuring large profits. It does so by encouraging repeat purchases of products that the customer already has in their possession (Smart 2010:85). Planned obsolescence takes two forms: aesthetic, and physical.

Aesthetic planned obsolescence relies on the concept of taste and the cycle of fashion, wherein certain types or styles of products may be more desirable at a certain time than others. This is especially true for clothing, but also applies to home décor, household appliances, and vehicles. Aesthetic obsolescence is the change in appearance of a product while maintaining its original function. This may occur in something as simple as commodity packaging or advertisement wording, but can also be a change in shape or colour of the physical product that does not enhance its function. Aesthetic obsolescence keeps consumers aware of ‘new’ or ‘hot’ items promoted by advertising and keeps profits high by encouraging early discard of functioning goods due to the purchasing of newer items.

Planned obsolescence also exists in the physical alteration of goods. Unlike aesthetic obsolescence, it relies on actual engineering changes to promote an altered function of the object. It does so in two ways: first, it creates products that are similar to pre-existing ones but have one small new function, making all previous products without the additional innovation obsolete (Smart 2010:85). Second, it may deliberately shorten the life span of a good by creating a weak or substandard product. Common household

appliances are often manufactured with a 'death date', forcing them to stop working after a set period of time thus making the owner purchase the product again. This maintains high volumes of production and company profit in many manufacturing fields.

The introduction of planned obsolescence has altered the consumer perspective; consumers no longer look for durability in products and instead consider disposability of an item (Smart 2010:89). This decreases long-term attachment to an item and instead encourages a 'throwaway' culture wherein people evaluate goods based on their disposability, keeping in mind they can always buy another item if they do not like it or need the commodity they have.

Industrialization appears to fit modern ideas that include freedom, reason, and progress by encouraging discipline, labour and work ethic. However, the wants/needs cycle paired with advertising encourages immediate satisfaction and gratification, making work ethic and long-term goals harder to encourage and support within consumer society (Slater 1997:29). This leads to a decline in the interests of production and a shift towards consumption as the primary characteristic of society. Although many foundational aspects of modernity remain, societal structures change and cause adaptations, causing the emergence of postmodern consumer society.

POSTMODERNITY

The defining feature of a shift from modern to postmodern consumer society is the dematerialization of objects into signs, a concept advocated by Jean Baudrillard (Slater 1997). While principal aspects like economic profit and advertising remained present, there were interesting shifts in consumption due to the identification of objects as

signs. This affected ideas of human relationships, the cycle of need/want, and the concept of fetishism, and shifted the defining feature of society from production to consumption.

Signs

In the postmodern period of consumerism, Baudrillard believed that “consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is *a systematic act of the manipulation of signs*” (Baudrillard 1988:22). He advocated that it was not actually the material object that people were interested in consuming, but the sign that was present in the object. Instead of looking to the materiality of the object, people were interested in consuming external meaning. This meant that meaning went beyond materiality of the thing; it was extended to the endowed sign. Thus, consumption changed from object use to the creation and consumption of meaning. Objects were consumed based on meaning and the sign they conveyed to others. Baudrillard advocated an understanding that in this shift objects are not actually consumed, instead people consume signs that find their expression through objects (Baudrillard 1988:22). Thus, in order for an object to be consumed, it must be a sign. This shifted consumption from material need to the desire for signs and meaning.

The shift in the consumption of goods to the consumption of signs affected the needs/wants debate. Baudrillard argues that the idea that need or want is inherently tied to buy/purchase is false and a tautology. He criticizes this approach as a “consumed reflection on consumption” (Baudrillard 1988:44); self-evident notions of needs and satisfactions will only ever lead to consumer analyses. Instead of looking at needs, attention must be given to the understanding of objects as signs and their interchangeability. In this perspective, objects cannot be tied to function but to a sign that

depends on the recognition and/or interpretation done by the owner. This fluidity of signification is something new to objects. This allows the desire for objects to widen and include a desire for signs, creating more wants to be satisfied. The manipulation of sign into an object personalizes the experience for the consumer while broadening the target group of an item. Multiple signs may exist in one item ensuring more connection to consumers.

Baudrillard believes that tracing specific needs is impossible because they no longer exist; they have been replaced by desires that are created and are not inherent. Consumers no longer look for objects to fill a need, but for signs to fulfill a desire. Because false needs are not natural needs and desire is limitless, satisfaction and fulfillment are impossible. Baudrillard states that if satisfaction is impossible, defining a need to be satisfied is also impossible, and thus needs can no longer be defined at all (Baudrillard 1988:45). Thus, “the system of consumption is based on a code of signs and differences, and not on need and pleasure” (Baudrillard 1988:47). This shifts the needs/wants debate because it takes it out of the context of definable needs and points to the inability of the desire of signs to provide satisfaction, highlighting the failure of consumption to create happiness⁴.

Human Interaction

The importance of postmodern consumer society goes beyond objects as signs however; this is the period when the procurement of goods begins to affect human interaction. The change in objects from material goods to signs allows for different entities in life to also become signs. Baudrillard notices this with relationships between

⁴ Note that Baudrillard does not mean to say that needs in humanity do not exist, only that a system of consumption is not attuned to these needs.

people; the ability to commoditize a relationship through sign placement allows for the relation to be consumed:

Human relations tend to be consumed ... in and through objects, which become the necessary mediation and, rapidly, the substitutive sign, *the alibi*, of the relations. We can see that what is consumed are not objects but the relation itself...it is the *idea of the relation* that is consumed in the series of objects which manifests it. This is no longer a lived relation: it is abstracted and annulled in an object-sign where it is consumed. (Baudrillard 1988:22).

This process exists within postmodern society due to the shift from production to consumption. Consumer society becomes such that any process that is not a part of consumption interrupts the natural flow of production. Thus, the 'lived relation' must find a way to become consumed along with everything else in society (Baudrillard 1988:22).

This idea actually stems from Marx's conception that all processes of life can and will become contained in the order of production (Marx, 1967). Postmodernity allows for the extension of this idea due to the change in consumption from objects to signs, which makes non-material things such as relationships consumable. This then means that there are no limits to consumption, and thus "we have reached the point where 'consumption' has grasped the whole of life" (Baudrillard 1988:33). This is why postmodern society is characterized by consumption as opposed to production.

Postmodern Fetishism

The shift from modernity to postmodernity and the changing nature of objects to signs affected the concept of fetishism. Baudrillard emphasized, "men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings...but by *objects*" (Baudrillard 1988:29).

Interaction with material items has increased as human relations have decreased. Thus, "we have come to live in less proximity to other human beings...and more under the silent gaze of deceptive and obedient objects" (Baudrillard 1988:29). Because we are

absent from other humans, objects begin to take the place of human interactions and relations. In a way, material goods have come to surround us in such a way as to alienate and dominate us. Indeed, we have created these products that are assisting in a type of dehumanization by breaking apart societal bonds. Objects are capable of destroying relationships due to their increasing presence, despite us having produced the goods. We have created and reified alienation from ourselves, while working within the controlling forces of the law of exchange (Baudrillard 1988:30). This fetishism shifts the alienation and exploitation from the worker to every consuming person in society, thus increasing destruction.

The postmodern shift in objects appears simple at first: material objects become signs for people to consume, shifting from physical items to embodied meaning. But this shift generated changes in the consumption process: it increased the presence of consumption in society, affected the relation between consumers and goods by changing needs and desires, and began infringing on human relationships while increasing its alienating qualities. These aspects have come to be important characteristics of consumer society.

LIQUID MODERNITY

Many authors stop at postmodernism as the current characterization of society; however certain changes have occurred that have altered the processes of consumer society. Zygmunt Bauman recognizes this shift after postmodernity, referring to it as liquid modernity. This account of current society adds consideration of the changing nature of time, fetishism, and human relationships.

Bauman describes a liquid modern world as “a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes for the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines” and thus it cannot “keep its shape or stay on course” (Bauman 2005:1). By this he means that structures in society are in a state of constant change, making it nearly impossible for individuals to discover and learn reactions to those structures before they change again. The result is a life of uncertainty due to fast-moving events and a succession of new beginnings without defined endings. This type of movement provides a perfect backdrop for a consumer lifestyle; it allows for quicker purchasing and disposal of items, and thus “a liquid life is a consuming life” (Bauman 2005:9). The difference from modernity and postmodernity is that liquid modern consumer culture no longer indicates a society of producers or consumers, but instead a society of consumer identities; a structure whose inner workings are defined by the fluidity of ever changing identities built through consumption (Bauman 2005:82). People are framed by the consumerism in which they participate, which is largely shaped by their means and objects of consumption. Bauman calls this a ‘consumerist syndrome’: consumption goes beyond need, pleasure, or desire and instead determines important aspects of individuality such as attitude, cognitive dispositions, value judgments and visions of happiness (Bauman 2005:83). While this may have been an unintended consequence of consumer advocates such as corporations and large businesses, current consumption embraces all aspects of life and life functions so as to allow for a ‘marketization’ of life and its processes (Bauman 2005:88). Objects here go beyond a dematerialization into signs for consumption and become small pieces of identity that construct individuals.

Pointillist Time

One interesting aspect of liquid modernity is the concept of pointillist time. Borrowing from Michel Maffesoli (2006), pointillist time is a departure from both the cyclical and linear time of other societies. Pointillist time is characterized “by the profusion of *ruptures* and *discontinuities*, by intervals separating successive spots and breaking the links between them” rather than by the actual content that exists within the spots (Bauman 2007:32). It emphasizes the inconsistency of time and the lack of continuity that exists. Bauman describes pointillist time as being comprised of ‘eternal instants’ rather than long-term time spans.

The interesting and problematic aspect of pointillist time is the illusion of infinite possibilities that are inherently doomed. Each moment in time appears ripe with opportunity no matter the circumstance because of its isolation and frequency; chance appears in favour at every turn, whether or not practicality deems the situation to be likely to fail. Because of the short time periods, none of the opportunities are able to be fulfilled; a new opportunity comes along before the previous moment has a chance to succeed. As Bauman states: “a map of pointillist life... would bear an uncanny similarity to a graveyard of imaginary, fantasized or grossly neglected and unfulfilled possibilities” (2007:33). Indeed, “the ‘newest’ life tends to be a ‘hurried’ life” (Bauman 2007:35) because of the fear of missing an opportunity.

Pointillist time is therefore a lack of progress that functions to hold excitement in the possibility of every moment. This fits well with the concept of consumer society: in this type of timeline consumption is done in the moment without consideration for the long term. This increases ‘buy now’ attitudes and plays into the want/need construction

upheld by advertising. It also reflects on planned obsolescence and fads or fashion. For this reason, pointillist time is a key feature in the latest development of consumer culture.

Subjectivity Fetishism

The shift from postmodern to liquid modern society again affects commodity fetishism. Marx's fetishism was a commodity fetishism that dictated embodied labour relations in goods; Baudrillard believed in a value fetishism that allowed objects in society to dominate human relationships and recreate processes of alienation not between workers and owners of production but through absence of human relations due to the prominence of the consumption of signs. Bauman however advocates subjectivity fetishism: commodities and objects now embody hidden aspects of identity and the subjective self (Bauman 2007:14). Objects work as pieces of our subjectivity and identity despite being material goods for exchange. While Baudrillard suggests that objects are endowed with signs according to what people or desire dictates, Bauman argues that objects go beyond signs and actually contain pieces of our individuality of which we are not aware. This means that material items in society play a larger role in the creation of our individual selves that we may recognize. This then leads to the idea that subjectivities in society are controlled by objects instead of people, once again bringing to mind an alienation that exists this time between an object's ability to construct our individuality and our belief that we are the sole constructors of our selves. This continual shift in fetishism highlights how material objects are more than their physical form; they are never only what they appear to be, drawing attention to the lack of complete control humans have over objects despite being their creators.

Relations

In liquid modern society Bauman also sees a shift in the relations between people. He notes that relations are strained due to consumption and the presence of material goods, primarily in the way that they demand larger amounts of time from people. Wants and needs encouraged by advertising cause people to require money to buy goods; this increases working hours. The decline in free time leads to less time for relationship building. People neglect the daily interactions with others required to keep up human relations because they are chasing after material items they believe will make them or others happy. Thus they have “less time for empathy and the intense, sometimes tortuous and painful but always lengthy and energy-consuming negotiations, let alone the resolutions, of their mutual misapprehensions and disagreements” (Bauman 2007:121). The overall ability to interact with people thus declines and members of society are incapable of maintaining relationships in the same manner as they did previously, through time and interaction. This opens up another space for material goods in our lives and something Arlie Hochschild calls ‘materialized love’.

Hochschild describes materialized love as acts "to maintain the emotional reversal of work and family" (2003:208). Longer work hours decrease time spent building relations with family and friends, so material goods are given in the form of gifts to show affection or appreciation. Gift giving then becomes a substitute for time spent interacting with people. Bauman is wary of the growing efficiency of gift giving; the more we rely on gifts to fill emotional gaps, "the fewer opportunities are left for the mutually sympathetic understanding called for by the notorious power/care ambiguity of love" (Bauman 2007:121). This does not only affect the functioning of healthy intimate

relationships, but is conducive to detrimental effects in everyday relations and interactions. This also relates back to the cyclical nature of consumption: advertising promotes more purchasing, which leads to more work hours and decreasing time for relationship building, which is then remedied by a gift-giving that requires more money, and so on. In the meantime, human relationships and general happiness declines, once again due to increased levels of consumption. Materialized love thus becomes a key concept in discussions of the current consumer world.

Liquid modernity is a debated concept, however its highlights new changes in consumer society. It provides a third approach to commodity fetishism and highlights the changing structures in time that affect consumerism. It also allows further analysis on the relation between objects and people, which continue to evolve in adverse ways.

CONCLUSION

The above overview of consumer culture provides a brief understanding of the changing nature of society under industrialization. It draws attention to the complexity of the commodity, the role of advertising in understanding need, the ability of corporations to control members of society, and the way in which objects interfere in our everyday lives. These aspects of society are ingrained in the way we live and in how we conduct ourselves. The discussions above are intended to provide a small backdrop for the society in which hoarding takes place, and later will play a role in the development of a new perspective on hoarding.

CHAPTER 3: THE MEDICAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOARDING BEHAVIOUR

In the social problem sphere pinpointing where hoarding falls is a complex task. I have chosen to approach the situation using social problem construction theory because it provides a method for dealing with the varying accounts of hoarding. Using this approach I identify two existing constructions of hoarding, one within the medical sphere and one within the moral sphere. To these I add my own construction that considers the social structures in consumer society alongside the objective behaviours of hoarding. Before addressing these constructions I will provide an overview of social construction theory, including key processes and the terminology used for constructing differing accounts of the behaviour.

SOCIAL PROBLEM CONSTRUCTION THEORY

In the past, social problems were framed using an objectivist position that relied heavily on facts and data. It was thought that empirical objectivism was the best way to identify a social problem in an impartial way. Many however found that this limited the definition of social problems and excluded many situations that were influenced by subjective aspects (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:5). The first attempt to reject the objectivist perspective proposed a value-conflict perspective of social problems theory. This approach advocated that objective conditions are a necessary but not sufficient aspect of social problems; an account of the subjective situation was necessary to understand why it was problematic (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:44). Again, this perspective was limiting and did not always address all facets of a social problem. It was Howard Becker who then

suggested that objective conditions are *neither* necessary nor sufficient for understanding a social problem. This led to a reconsideration of the importance of the subjective aspects of social problems.

Malcolm Spector and John Kitsuse wrote *Constructing Social Problems* [1977] to provide an alternative approach to understanding social problems. They believed a social problem to be less a fact in existence and more an ongoing activity in society (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:73). They define social problems as “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:75). The purpose of the study of social problems becomes not to locate and identify the objective conditions that constitute the problem, but to explore the social activities that come to define the situation as problematic. This means that objective conditions may or may not play a role in the defining of the social problem; instead the important factor is the identification of the assertions being made about the objective conditions (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:76).

As opposed to objective conditions, the constructionist perspective involves examining what Spector and Kitsuse call ‘claims-making activities’ (2001:78). They argue that claims-making includes interaction between a claimant and another party about the mentioned condition. They also mention that the “claimant has a right at least to be heard, if not to receive satisfaction” (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:78). This brings the claimant and the type of claim into the centre of the social problem discussion, removing the focus on objective aspects. This approach requires consideration for the people making the claims but also for how those people define them; it is not the social conditions in themselves but the ‘full range of definitional activities’ that constitute the

situation as a constructed problem (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:79). This perspective provides several different framing options for any problem depending on the claims and claims-makers, and broadens the potential list of social problems.

Method

I chose social construction theory to aid in the understanding of hoarding because it highlights the alternating use of objective and subjective conditions in the definition of a social problem. This approach encourages an interpretation of a problem that acknowledges how social actors impact the understanding of the behaviour. In the case of hoarding, this approach is particularly useful because it allows for several differing constructions of hoarding as a social problem, each one acknowledging the different claims and claims-makers that produce an understanding of the situation as problematic. This approach also allows for the development of a new construction of hoarding as a social problem, one that utilizes new claims and a different combination of objective and subjective aspects.

In the following chapters I present three different constructions of hoarding, moving from the medical and moral constructions that exist to my own construction that considers hoarding behaviour alongside current consumer society. Each approach addresses the objective conditions of hoarding in a different way, while acknowledging the impact and influence of subjective forces and claims that frame the problem.

HOARDING AS A MEDICAL CONSTRUCTION

The medical construction of hoarding is the most popular and well-known construction of hoarding today; most of the published literature on hoarding exists in the

medical sphere, and many people associate hoarding with mental health problems. This perspective of hoarding can be understood by using social construction theory to incorporate both objective and subjective claims about the behaviour. One of the most important aspects of this construction is a process called medicalization.

Medicalization

Medicalization is a term created to explain the increase of medical explanations for human behaviours. Medicalization “describes a process by which non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorders” (Conrad 1992:4). The past thirty years has seen an increase in ‘syndromes’ described by the medical community; however it is important to question if there are more health disorders being discovered, or if regularly occurring behaviours and situations are being placed into a medical context. It has been suggested that the public’s tolerance of mild symptoms has decreased, making previously uncomfortable maladies into chronic diseases (Conrad 1992:6). While the process of medicalization is not an exact science, it is believed certain support structures aid in the development of a medical classification. These include medical professionals, medical insurance providers, individuals who promote or challenge changes in medical definitions, and the availability and profitability of treatments (Conrad 1992:7). These people and groups become claimants for the claim that a behaviour is medical, often working together to promote their ideas.

The key to the medicalization of any behaviour is in the process of definition. A behaviour becomes defined using medical language and terminology, is understood through a medical framework, and is treated with medical services (Conrad 1992:5). The behaviour thus goes through a process to become medicalized, often taking time to

become established as a medical problem. Medicalization does not mean inherently that the behaviour is in fact a medical problem, or that it is a problem at all; it only describes the process that the behaviour went through to become understood as a medical problem. Behaviours that are already found in the medical sphere can be medicalized if their definition or classification is challenged by opposing or newly developed claims or claims-makers.

The medicalized situation often highlights individual-level behaviour rather than social environment (Conrad 1992:8). It focuses on individuals who exhibit particular behaviours or suffer from maladies that are not explicitly connected to external forces. This causes the behaviour to be seen as a personal issue rather than a public trouble. Treatment for medical behaviours is often prescribed on an individual behaviour, whether through certain medications, participation in therapies, or lifestyle changes. Infrequently are the social aspects of the behaviour considered; systemic problems are overlooked and collective or social solutions are ignored. Medicalization has also become a way for the medical industry and its members to secure jurisdiction over more behaviours, often profiting from their diagnosis and/or treatment. This may include promoting pharmaceuticals or expensive therapies as cures.

Medicalization of hoarding behaviour

Social construction theory is often used to describe how certain behaviours come to be understood as a medical problem (Conrad 2005), and the case of hoarding is no different. A medicalized construction of hoarding behaviour involves medical claims-makers including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and clinical therapists. Their claim is that hoarding is an abnormal behaviour that is a medical illness. They

identify hoarding as a mental disease, similar to other anxiety disorders that prevent the individual from leading a regular life.

Claims-makers draw attention to the increased acquisition that hoarders exhibit and their inability to discard items. They cite anxiety parting with objects and emphasize how certain interactions with goods evoke extreme emotion and distress in the hoarder. Claims-makers emphasize a decline in individual wellbeing, noting mental health stressors such as depression and social isolation. They may also draw attention to physical health hazards such as mould and dust, structural hazards including loss of electricity or running water, or problems with participation in society such as employment issues.

In this construction of hoarding, claims-makers also dictate treatment of the illness, advocating individual or group therapy (Frost and Hartl 1996; Steketee et al. 2010). The intention is to rehabilitate the individual by reinforcing low acquisition habits while practicing regular discarding through self-talk. Discussions of treatment involving medications have recently become a potential option, however these cases often describe the presence of a comorbid condition. Medications are thus intended to treat the anxiety, OCD or depressive condition rather than the hoarding condition. Rehabilitation without relapse is the end goal.

The claims made for hoarding in a medical sphere have combined to produce a medicalized definition of hoarding behaviour. Mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the definition by Frost and Gross emphasizes distress and impairment on the part of the hoarder and suggests an unliveable space. This definition reinforces the progression in

the medical sphere to list hoarding not only as a problem but as one that requires help or assistance, in this case by medical professionals.

Although the Frost and Gross definition came early in the process of establishing hoarding as a medical behaviour, it has been continually used in the literature and most recently was included in the definition of hoarding behaviour in the 2013 publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The 17-year lapse between the Frost and Gross definition in 1996 and the inclusion of hoarding in the latest edition of the DSM reflects the process of medicalization that has taken place and the time required for claims-makers to legitimize their claims.

This construction of hoarding seems very convincing; research has produced data that suggests hoarding is a mental illness similar to other anxiety disorders. Hoarders show more distress than non-hoarders due to problems with accumulation and difficulty discarding. Their habits require medical assistance to return them to a 'normal' state of being. This approach however reflects the increasing practice of medicalization and the narrowing scope of the behaviour.

One of the most obvious aspects of the legitimation of hoarding as a medicalized behaviour is the plethora of medical studies being published, specifically within the area of psychology. An Internet search will bring up thousands of articles, and more are being added each week. Many of these studies look at the characteristics of hoarding behaviour and its impact on the individuals, however all of the literature exists in a medical sphere and supports the idea that hoarding is a medical behaviour. I provide an overview here of the important studies and controversies of which to take note.

Medical Literature on Hoarding

The first data collected on hoarding appear in a study by Randy Frost and Rachel Gross titled “The Hoarding of Possessions” (1993). It collected data from a control group as well as a group of self-proclaimed hoarders, and sought to explore the nature of hoarding behaviour. Likert scale questionnaires in interviews combined questions about hoarding tendencies such as perfectionism, indecisiveness, trouble discarding, and reactions to parting with items, with other scales in the mental health field that address anxiety disorders and obsessive compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) (Frost and Gross 1993). The data collected from this study was used to build a framework for future investigation of the aspects and dimensions of hoarding behaviour.

Since that time many researchers in the field of psychology have studied hoarding behaviours. Studies aim to pinpoint the definition of hoarding by measuring things aspects such as acquisition, clutter, perfectionism and cleanliness. Some exist to determine the impact of hoarding on daily living and state institutions by examining things like employment, income, and health. Others look to address the controversy over hoarding as an aspect of other mental health disorders such as anxiety disorders or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These studies generally find their participants through self-help groups or on the Internet, and often use control groups during data collection. Some also consider reports from family members of hoarders. Many require the creation of their own scales for measurement, using likert scale questionnaires or qualitative data from personal interviews to draw conclusions. Below I outline a few important aspects of different studies as well as some major issues that exist in the hoarding literature.

Studies of note

Many studies conducted on hoarding aim to further define the behaviour by studying the characteristics that hoarders display. A study headed by Randy Frost looked at the characteristics of hoarding behaviour in terms of acquisition (Frost et al. 2009). They found that 61% of their hoarding sample displayed traits consistent with compulsive buying while 86% of participants reported at least moderate acquisition problems. This suggests that acquisition is a characteristic consistent with classifications of hoarding behaviour. They also found however that up to 20% of chronic hoarders did not report excessive levels of acquisition. They suggest this may be due to noticeability of items and gradual build-up of everyday items. Thus, they propose that there are two kinds of hoarding that exist: one with high acquisition, and one without. This study draws attention to the differing acquisition methods of hoarders.

Another area of study involves the economic and social impacts of hoarding. David Tolin led a research team to understand how hoarding behaviour may impact state services (Tolin, Frost, Steketee, Gray, et al. 2008c). They found that 59% of hoarding participants reported not working, and 35% were fired due to disruptions in their life caused by their hoarding lifestyle. 38% of participants reported incomes under the poverty threshold in the United States in 2005. In terms of health, 78% of chronic hoarders reported body mass indexes that were classified as obese, and 63% reported at least one chronic or severe medical condition. These findings draw attention to the way that hoarding behaviours may be straining the welfare state system, whether due to increasing health costs or lack of participation in the labour force. The authors believed the study showed significant role impairment for hoarders, although they could not say

the monetary value associated with the social burden of a person with severe hoarding behaviour. This type of study draws attention to the social costs of hoarding and how a personal problem impacts the social sphere. The above studies highlight just a few of the areas being researched in the current medical hoarding literature.

OCD controversy

The biggest controversy in the medical hoarding literature is how to classify the behaviour. From the beginning many suggested that excessive accumulation and difficulty discarding were directly linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Many studies have since been conducted refuting the link between hoarding behaviour and OCD.

One study conducted looked at the relation between core features of hoarding (clutter, difficulty discarding, acquiring) and other mental diseases including OCD and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Tolin and Villavicencio 2011). After conducting multiple regression analysis with the data collected from self proclaimed hoarders, non-hoarding OCD patients, and healthy control groups, they found that the presence of OCD symptoms did not predict any of the core features of hoarding behaviour (Tolin and Villavicencio 2011). Predictive capacity for hoarding behaviour was increased however when adult ADHD symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity were added to the models. This draws attention to a stronger link between hoarding and ADHD than OCD.

Another study measured comorbidity with OCD symptoms and found that fewer than 20% of hoarding participants met the criteria for OCD (Frost, Steketee, and Tolin 2011b). Hoarders were more likely to display symptoms of a variety of other diseases

linked with impulse control. While comorbidity rates were the highest for major depressive disorder (MDD), ADHD was found in 28% of cases, emphasizing again that inattentiveness is more frequently present in hoarding cases than compulsive behaviours.

Although the link between hoarding and OCD has been weakened through the above studies, researchers still sought the difference between hoarding that results from a difficulty discarding and one that results from OCD. A study conducted by Alberto Pertusa, Randy Frost and David Mataix-Cols (2010) looked at cases of hoarding that were the result of severe OCD behaviours. They found that the reasons for accumulation and inability to discard were very different than those displayed by hoarders that were not diagnosed with OCD. In patients interviewed, the researchers found that OCD hoarding was due to either: 1) a relief of obsessional doubt⁵; 2) a prevention of harm from obsession or contamination fear; or 3) a relief of feelings of incompleteness (Pertusa, Frost, and Mataix-Cols 2010). In three of the ten cases hoarding appeared to be a result of checking compulsions, in which the onerous process of checking items was exhausting and accumulation occurred due to insufficient time or resources to deal with the items. In two of the cases hoarding occurred due to attempts to prevent harm to others, for example due to fear of contamination. Those five cases did not report that their possessions had a special meaning or held a great significance to them, generally an indicator of hoarding behaviour, thus they were all classified as hoarding due to OCD. The other five cases reported accumulation due to a feeling of incompleteness if they were to discard their possessions. This was also linked to symmetry or ordering obsessions, wherein items are

⁵ ‘Obsessional doubt’ refers to a thinking process that requires a sufferer of OCD to continually question whether or not something was done or concluded, for instance if the oven is off. This often leads to compulsive checking.

stored or positioned in a particular manner and cannot be disturbed without causing extreme anxiety (Pertusa et al. 2010). This type of symptom is sometimes found in hoarding, but the relation is yet to be examined.

From the results the authors suggested a few definitional aspects that distinguish hoarding from OCD. This includes factors such as the severity of the hoard, the items being hoarded (OCD hoarders tend to hoard more ‘bizarre’ items such as trash, feces, urine, nails, hair, etc.), and the presence of psychiatric psychopathy as opposed to squalor or unsanitary conditions (Pertusa et al. 2010). These aspects differ from the symptoms recorded in hoarding behaviours, including emphasis on acquisition and differing reasons for the inability to discard. This draws attention to the present nature of attachment in hoarding that is absent in OCD, and differentiates the two behaviours. Due to the above studies, much of the debate on hoarding as a facet of OCD has been resolved.

DSM-V

The research supporting the distinction between hoarding and OCD prompted further investigation into the placement of hoarding in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The fourth edition of the DSM listed hoarding as a facet of OCD; it places “the inability to discard worn-out or worthless objects even when they have no sentimental value” in the eight criteria for obsessive compulsive personality disorder (OCPD)⁶ (Pertusa et al. 2010:1012). With the increasing research on the differentiation between hoarding and OCD, medical professionals believed hoarding required a separate entry in the DSM, to be listed among other anxiety disorders.

⁶ OCD and OCPD are different disorders: the difference between the two is the presence of true obsession and compulsion in OCD, making it an anxiety disorder. OCPD refers to chronic patterns to cope with life challenges.

The placement of hoarding in the DSM required a clarified definition. Frost and Hartl (1996) originally began with a diagnostic criteria that included: 1) the acquisition of and failure to discard a large number of possessions that seem to be useless or of limited value; 2) living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed, and; 3) significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding (Frost and Hartl 1996). The following was added to the definition to make it more compatible with entry criteria in the DSM:

- 1) difficulty discarding or parting with personal possessions,
- 2) symptoms that result in accumulation of a large number of possessions that clutter living space,
- 3) symptoms causing clinically significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning,
- 4) symptoms not due to a general medical condition, and
- 5) symptoms not restricted to the symptoms of another mental disorder (Mataix-Cols et al. 2010:558).

The last two criteria are a response to the overlap of hoarding with other mental health diseases such as OCD or ADHD, thus isolating hoarding as a separate behaviour to be listed in the DSM.

After advocacy from several researchers, including hoarding specialists Randy Frost, David Mataix-Cols, David Tolin, and Alberto Pertusa, the American Psychological Association issued a media release in December of 2012 stating that they would include what will now be known as ‘hoarding disorder’ in the fifth edition of the DSM. They advocated that “this disorder will help characterized people with persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions” noting that the behaviour includes “emotional, physical, social, financial, and even legal” harmful effects (Association 2012). The DSM-V was published in May 2013. This publication represents the classification of hoarding as a mental health disorder and solidifies its presence in the medical sphere. It is much

easier to draw attention to a disorder in a medicalized way if a behaviour has been given formal classification in the manual, which assists in diagnosis as well as treatment. Thus, the challenge to consider hoarding from a non-medical perspective becomes more difficult.

Flaws and limitations

Although some of the data results collected on hoarding studies are useful in understanding the behaviour, there are important flaws and limitations to the methodologies employed that may have implications for the medical approach.

Most if not all of the studies note problems with methodology, mainly that all individual studies rely on the self-reporting of hoarding behaviour. Access to people with hoarding symptoms is limited to the ability of people to understand what hoarding is and then to identify themselves as hoarders. The identification depends on several outside sources on what constitutes hoarding, which may encourage reporting due to a negative association with the behaviour. Self-reports may be due to social pressures that insist that hoarding is wrong and must be ‘cured’; many self-reports may come from pressure for conformity. Some authors recognize that the problem with self-reporting is the intentional seeking of help, thus making the participant hyper-aware of their behaviour (Frost, Pekareva-Kochergina, and Maxner 2011a). Others mention that self-reporting largely ignores other people who may display hoarding behaviours but who have not self-identified as hoarders (Frost et al. 2009). Locating non-identified hoarders is nearly impossible, limiting the availability of data. These people may exhibit different sorts of behaviours and attitudes that might alter the results of a study and affect reliability. Many

studies attempt to rectify this by first sampling from a subset of the general population and then from a subset of self-reported hoarders (Frost and Gross 1993; Frost et al. 1998).

Another concern for samples involves the use of Internet access. Randy Frost and David Tolin conducted a large Internet survey that involved both self-identified hoarders as well as non-hoarding individuals with a hoarding relative. The results of this data set were published in several papers⁷. However, the results come with the knowledge that this data set was limited by not only self-identification as a hoarder but more importantly by access to internet and exposure to the project, which may have limited the sample diversity.

All of these flaws may be small and many controlled for, but they beg the question about unreported and unidentified 'hoarders'. These people may be unreported for a reason linked to the severity of hoarding, or due to lack of peer or societal pressure. Or, they may not identify with the definition of hoarding as a problem and have no interest in changing their behaviour. This subset of people may be important in understanding the structure and causes of the behaviour and removing individual mental illness from the classification.

The medical literature that exists is expansive and covers several different aspects of hoarding behaviour; however all research remains in a medical discussion on mental health diseases. While some survey results provide important information as to how hoarding impacts daily life and the welfare state, it is important to recognize the methodological limits to understanding hoarding behaviour through a medicalized lens.

⁷ See (Frost et al. 2009; Tolin, Fitch, et al. 2008a; Tolin, Frost, Steketee, and Fitch 2008b; Tolin, Frost, Steketee, Gray, et al. 2008c)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Medicalization is a process of definition; hoarding has become a medical problem through defining the behaviour as a mental health disorder that requires intervention and assistance. While there exists an abundance of research linking the behaviours of accumulation and lack of discard with mental distress or self-harm, it is important to note the flaws in those studies and how they limit an interpretation of hoarding. The medical definition of hoarding contains the necessary presence of ‘distress’ or ‘impairment’; however it is possible that accumulation does not cause these reactions, and instead there is an imposition of those feelings on a person who hoards. There is also potential with a medical definition of hoarding for a medical treatment, which could lead to pharmaceuticalization of the behaviour. A medical framework of hoarding limits alternative approaches to hoarding, and assists in the labeling of a behaviour as unnatural. Whether or not these labels are true are hard to determine within a frame that already assumes them so.

The medicalization of hoarding behaviour has taken a long period of definition to become legitimated within the medical sphere. The researchers that claim hoarding is a mental illness have produced numerous studies that look at what constitutes the behaviour and how it is detrimental to an individual. This abundance of research begs an explanation of why I would dismiss this construction of hoarding. I do not entirely refute this presentation of hoarding; in some cases, anxiety and depression may contribute to habits of accumulation and an inability to discard items. Certain traumatic events may also trigger hoarding habits. I wish to draw attention to the presentation of all hoarding cases as mental health problems, and propose an alternative frame for considering

hoarding behaviour. A medical construction of hoarding behaviour is the construction of subjective claims about the behaviour; it does not refer specifically to the objective conditions of the behaviour, only the subjective reactions. While a medical approach recognizes accumulation and the inability to discard as an aspect of hoarding, it also claims ideas of harm and the acquisition of worthless items as indicative of the behaviour, which may or may not be accurate. While a medical approach may be informative in some aspects, its subjective claims may limit an understanding of the objective conditions. This is why it is important to consider the multiple constructions of a social problem that may be available.

CHAPTER 4: THE MORAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOARDING BEHAVIOUR

The second social problem construction of hoarding I will discuss is one framed by moral regulation. Moral regulation deals with the ways in which different society members determine what is moral and how they impose those moralities on other members.

Hoarding can be understood as a morally regulated problem; there exist claims and claimants that construct an idea of hoarding as immoral and thus problematic within society. The most important aspect of a moral construction of hoarding is the way in which moral ideas are disseminated; these techniques later establish the foundation for self-regulation of the behaviour, signalling the embedding of certain moral ideologies in everyday society.

Moral Regulation

Moral regulation is a form of problematizing a situation or behaviour so as to impose a particular reformation on members of society (Hunt 1999). The move to promote moral ideologies often comes from a small group that later grows in numbers. They are generally not holders of institutional or political power, although these sorts of groups may later take up the same claims. Moral regulation can come from various social positions including those above, in the middle, and below (Hunt 1999). Above regulation refers to changes in laws and state advocacy groups. Middle regulation is characterized by other large but non-state groups or organizations. Lower level positions include non-organized or little-organized groups or 'grass-roots' groups that utilize ground level systems of advocacy such as personal protests or hand-delivered flyers. Each level is

separate but may join with other levels in various formations to emphasize their project. This means that there are several authorities involved in the process of moral regulation.

Occasionally moral regulation is applied through institutions and laws. Today there are for example regulations to address concerns over consumption, including alcohol distribution and second-hand smoking laws. There is currently less regulation being done by institutions and more being done by members of society who do not necessarily have any power or expertise. This reflects a change in where society gets its morals; previously morals were disseminated via the bible and the state, however the decline of religiosity prompted more societally developed ideas of morality.

Moral regulation necessarily involves a distinct discourse that allows the targeted behaviour to be considered wrong (Hunt 1999). In order to build this discourse, there are several aspects of moral regulation required: a moralized subject; an object; some sort of knowledge; a discourse within the knowledge that dictates normative content; a set of practices, and; a harm to be avoided (Hunt 1999:7). These elements create moral regulation only when found linked together; the moral dimension of the act is not an intrinsic characteristic, but instead must be created by addressing several aspects of the act and building a discourse. The most important aspect of the discourse is that some act or behaviour has been deemed intrinsically bad or wrong and involves a type of harm when committed. The link between 'bad' and 'harm' is important; it designates the act not only as displeasing or distasteful but actually harmful for either the person committing it or to others in society. This harm is targeted for removal by the regulation.

It is important to remember that moral regulation is a process; morality does not exist inherently or separately from members of a society. Instead, it is a constructed

understanding of conduct expressed by members of a society. The ideologies and discourses of morality are susceptible to change; much in the same way society is shaped and defined by the members in it, moral regulation is affected by the ideologies that exist today. Thus, what may be morally regulated at one point may not be so in the future, and what was previously overlooked may become controversial.

Moral Regulation and Social Problem Construction

Moral regulation lends itself well to a constructivist perspective of social problems. It already contains claims and claimants that work to create an ideology and disseminate it. Similar to constructed social problems, moral problems include an emphasis on ‘definitional activities’ that determine a behaviour to be wrong, immoral, or problematic. Whether the behaviour or situation is inherently immoral is not of concern, much like whether or not it is considered objectively problematic; instead the importance of the perspective relies on definitional characteristics that are determined by members of society.

Morality relies on subjective characteristics for its definition, which again makes it a great fit for a constructivist perspective of social problems. Ideas of morality are not considered objective; identifying moral wrongs in society is unlikely without having a subjective understanding of what moral ideologies are. Both approaches require a subjective claim to be established before the moral regulation or the problem identification can occur; for this reason, many situations that are morally regulated are subjectively defined social problems.

Hoarding as a Morally Regulated Behaviour

According to the elements described above, hoarding can be defined as a morally regulated behaviour. Several claimants and self-proclaimed experts work to build a discourse of harm from the behaviour, and then impose regulation on the individual that is hoarding. This group includes trained professionals such as doctors or therapists, professional organizers and counsellors trained to deal with clutter and disorganization, neighbourhood watchdogs concerned for property values, and health and safety personnel such as rescue workers or paramedics. In dangerous situations adult and child protective services may also get involved. The behaviour termed 'hoarding' is the object or target of change; the group advocating for change focus on altering habits of accumulation and the inability to discard. The harm discourse involved in moral regulation means that the focus is often on hoarded houses that pose potential health and safety risks due to rotting food, vermin or insect infestation, poor air quality, or structural damage. However, smaller levels of disorganization and clutter may also be included as the discourse is expanded, thus broadening the target for intervention.

Several forms of knowledge are utilized in producing a discourse due to the variety of claimants. As previously mentioned, medical claimants often advocate claims that hoarding is a mental illness that is beyond a hoarder's control. Professional organizers support ideas that cleanliness and organization are better for the health and happiness of individuals. Neighbourhood watch participants may advocate cleanliness due to aesthetics and comparative housing values. Rescue personnel are often concerned with the health of the inhabitant but also with the safety of any first responders in case of

an emergency. Overall these claims convey the idea that disorganization and lack of cleanliness are not morally acceptable.

These claims are then transformed by a discourse of harm; anything that does not fit into a 'normal' category as proclaimed by the claimants is considered harmful. Harm creates a reason to interfere with the individual committing the behaviour, the intention being to improve their life and help them avoid harm. The practices to avoid harm from hoarding are then introduced to the person at risk. These approaches may include curbing habits such as increased spending or the inability to part with items, or learning how to create spaces for things brought into the house in the name of organization. The key ideologies of cleanliness and organization are disseminated to the hoarder so as to convey that excess items and unclean spaces are not acceptable and the behaviours that produce them are immoral. The claims eventually penetrate the hoarder and they begin to believe the moral ideologies to be true. This then allows for the possibility of a self-regulation wherein the hoarder imposes regulation on him or herself and thus changes their behaviour in the name of morality.

Implementation

In the case of hoarding, moral regulation is most often implemented through a 'clean-up' process. Hoarding cases are introduced to a crew who removes all items in the house so that the hoarder can look through them while being coached to decide what to throw away. A large group of people is amassed to assist, including family, community members, religious figures, safety personnel, waste removal professionals, organizers, and occasionally counsellors, therapists, or psychiatrists. This team is meant to work with the person committing the behaviour to rid their living space of excess goods by instilling

new decision-making behaviours. This process is often introduced by family members wanting an intervention to change the behaviour of a hoarder, but it may be prompted by municipally imposed fines or the threat of jail. Often the hoarding participant is not willing to part with the goods and finds the intervention an invasion of privacy. This highlights the impact of an outside moral regulation being imposed on a person with hoarding behaviour.

Claims Dissemination

It is interesting to note the methods that are used to disseminate moral claims of hoarding to the general population. This includes using media including reality television, the formation of self-proclaimed experts such as professional organizers, and the creation of self-help literature. These methods allow claims to be introduced and adopted by the general population, engraining them into the minds of its members.

The media

The media play a large role in the dissemination of the claims that suggest hoarding is a morally wrong behaviour. Indeed, society today is greatly influenced by the media; in this day of lower rates of religion citizens need a place in which to seek ideas of what is right and wrong. The media provide this by creating news outlets and print media, which may include newspapers, magazines, billboards, and also by using radio and television. They provide content that implies a particular reaction that cues the audience members to accept or decline the behaviour as moral. The problem is that media is often crafted in certain ways that may not reflect reality.

Reality television

The recent phenomenon of reality television has impacted the dispersion of morals through segments on various subjects, including some lesser-known behaviours such as hoarding. I focus on the reality television impact on hoarding and morality because it is the most prominent form of media dealing with hoarding and it is the most disseminated and accessible. There do exist accounts of hoarding in other news media; however those reports are isolated and tend to focus less on human morality and more on state regulation. Newspapers often report property disputes between neighbours or a property owner and the state, and those accounts rarely mention family tensions or the imposition of others to clean the property to better the hoarder. Instead they focus more on the problem as a state situation rather than an individual behavioural problem. Reality television is very accessible and is often the first time a viewer is introduced to the hoarding topic outside of friends or family. It is a very popular form of television, its various programs signalling high viewership. But like all television, it disseminates information in an incomplete fashion; people believe reality television is real-life, which makes the audience susceptible to any intended ideologies placed by the production team. These ideologies often include moral cues.

Reality television - A&E's Hoarders

Reality television has drawn attention to hoarding behaviour by airing the conditions of hoarding and the situations faced by hoarders. The first programs were one-off features that tended to look more at reporting events than producing a storyline. This included specials on daytime talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Dr. Phil*, but also included documentary specials on *60 Minutes* and *The Discovery Channel*. This approach changed

with the introduction of A&E's *Hoarders* in 2009⁸. Currently in its 6th season, *Hoarders* is a forty-five minute episode series that films real-life hoarders⁹ and their experience with having to clean up their living space. Each episode usually deals with two different hoarded households and films over a series of a few days as 'professionals' enter the home to clear it of its contents. Every episode follows the same format: First the audience is introduced to all the people involved in the clean-up, including the hoarding individual(s), friends or family members who are encouraging the clean-up, any medical professionals that will be working with the crew, and the clean-up team that usually consists of a waste management specialist and a professional organizer. During the introductions the viewer sees photos and footage of the hoarded space and learns a bit about the hoarder's story. Following the introductions, the hoarder gives a tour to one of the professionals involved in the clean-up, highlighting the living conditions including kitchen and eating spaces and where the sleeping area is. The crew then begins working to remove all the items from the space, and either immediately throw away the items or place them in an area where the hoarder can sort through them to decide what is to be kept, thrown out, or given away. There are usually a few items that are difficult for the hoarder to part with and the audience is witness to the conversations and arguments between the hoarder and professionals on how to make decisions about parting with items. The episode generally

⁸ The other major reality television show in existence is The Learning Channel's (TLC) *Hoarding: Buried Alive*. While it runs in similar format to A&E's show, it is more sensationalized and less realistic. It deals more with hoards with increased vermin or garbage, and focuses more on the aggressive hoarders and their families than healing the hoarder. Currently TLC's show has more viewership, possibly resulting in harsher moral ideas of hoarding behaviour.

⁹ While certain aspects of the storyline may be scripted for the professional crew, all hoarders and their hoards exist in real-life. Dorothy Breininger (dorotheorganizer.com) and Matt Paxton verify this. See Paxton's Podcast "5 Decisions Away" or his book *The Secret Lives of Hoarders*.

ends with footage of the house much emptier and cleaner than before. The closing credits mention how the hoarder is doing after the clean-up and if they have accepted services offered by the television show such as therapy or professional organizer visits.

A reality television episode is often the first exposure to a hoarding situation for the audience. This means that whatever the episode portrays becomes a catchall for all hoarders: what is shown on screen is assumed to be truthful and representative of all hoarding situations. The audience then believes all hoarding situations are similar to the ones they see on television. This is risky because television often picks the most dramatic storylines to keep viewership high, and many of the hoards are at the very extreme end of the hoarding scale. It has been well established that not all hoards are the same: not all hoards impinge on living conditions or cause health and safety challenges¹⁰. Smaller hoarding situations are not often filmed and thus audiences do not know they exist. This is detrimental because all forms of hoarding in real life may be met with an excessive reaction of fear or emotion due to an assumption about the severity of a hoarding situation. In reality hoards exist in different forms and many do not require immediate assistance; however the portrayal of hoards on television prompt audience members to believe this and advocate assistance for hoarders whether they ask for it or not.

Hoarding episodes convey many moral claims to an audience. All hoarders involved are being prompted to clean up the living space by an outside force, whether family or friends or the state. Few participants identify themselves as hoarders at the beginning; many do not acknowledge that the items in the house are a problem, and more frequently suggest they are only a slight inconvenience. This supports the claim that

¹⁰ See The Institute for Challenging Disorder Clutter Rating Scale (2011) or “Development and Validation of the Clutter Image Rating Scale” by Frost et al. (2007)

hoarders require assistance whether or not they need it or agree they have a 'problem'. Instead audience members are taught that hoarders are being *harmed* and are in need immediate assistance. It also supports the idea that outside forces are required to deal with hoarding problems; every show introduces a trained psychiatrist specializing in hoarding or disorganization, implying that mental health issues are present in all hoarders. This again signals a need for help and intervention. Also involved are 'professional organizers', who support the moral claim that 'neat and tidy' is morally correct, while disorganized clutter is immoral. Organizers propose this ideology but it is easily disseminated as an overarching moral claim to audience members. Lastly, a professional clean up team is brought in to haul and discard unwanted items. Although this team works in the background, they have a presence due to their company names; the services most frequently used are "1-800-GOT-JUNK" and "Clutter Cleaner". Both of these names imply a judgement on the value of goods in a house, and suggest to a hoarder that their goods are worthless or valueless. To have several large trucks with these names on them pull up in front of a house allows for moral judgement by people nearby. In several episodes the hoarders mention the embarrassment faced by having a cleaning crew on their property. One episode follows a hoarder who requested a weekday date for a cleaning crew to ensure neighbours were not home to judge them¹¹. This is also tied to the shame that hoarders have, or are encouraged to have, due to their abundance of items.

Sensationalism

When A&E's show first began in 2009 it featured Dr. David Tolin, one of the foremost medical experts on hoarding behaviour. Tolin and his associates introduced the

¹¹ See A&E's *Hoarders* – "Janet and Christina" Season 2 Episode 14

show as an informative medically-sound program that was part of further research, which signalled to audience members that it was a legitimate documentary. The filming was sparse and production costs were low, but that meant a portrayal of hoarders that was often unedited and quite natural; however in more recent episodes, specifically since the beginning of the sixth season, the show has been sensationalized focusing on more and more disturbing hoards and more difficult hoarders with which to interact. The filming process has changed to include more scenes of distress, increased tension through theme music, and more on-screen texts emphasizing the severity of the hoard and the consequences for the hoarder, often jail or homelessness. This type of change amplifies the messages already being sent by the show: that hoarding is morally wrong, that hoarders need help, and that people must help them. Many shows now include a night scene where one of the cleaning experts spends the night in a hoarded household. They are filmed with a night vision camera and a hand-held camcorder, making note of the rodents and insects that are in the house. Most often the cleaning expert does not sleep due to fear, and in some cases leaves the home before dawn. This is an unnecessary part of the show that is used to highlight the disconnect between hoarders and 'normal' people. The most concerning aspect of the newer shows is the inclusion of a 'makeover scene' at the end of a hoard. This produces a more distinct 'before/after' photo that amplifies the severity of the hoard prior to the clean-up and emphasizes the acceptance of a hoarder that has a clean space. Interestingly, some hoarders have objected to this final action, stating how upset they were that someone else would decorate their home without knowing their own taste or preferences¹² Although rare, episode endings such as this one

¹² See A&E's *Hoarders* – "Debra and Patty" Season 6 Episode 68

may suggest ungratefulness for the help the hoarder was receiving, prompting the audience to consider them unthankful. Realistically, the person is simply reacting to an invasion of space and the unwelcome imposition of things they 'should' like but most likely do not. This can be interpreted as a morally imposed idea of what is tasteful or valuable, and is easily transferred as a moral regulation from screen to audience member, and then to society.

Tone

One of the interesting facets of *Hoarders* and the dissemination of a moral claim is the tone that the show portrays. Since the show was originally intended as a legitimate medical exploration of hoarding behaviour, the tone was established as one of aid and assistance. The hoarders all require help, not because they are horrible people but because they are experiencing a problem. All professionals interact with the hoarders in passive ways: they ask often how the hoarder is feeling or if they need some extra time before dealing with another room to clean. While this comes off to an audience as being nice, it also signals a relationship of passivity: the hoarders are weak people who require strong professionals to assist them. The hoarders are not dealt with aggressively because of the medical approach and the coaxing of a therapist to get them to 'admit' they are hoarders and start the 'healing' process. This journey requires a passive patient who is not resistant to new ideologies; however it also suggests that all hoarders are passive wrongdoers that are incapable of helping themselves and thus require outside assistance. This tone conveys a claim that hoarders are weak and society should feel sorry for them. This type of tone goes against what many would consider a frequent approach of reality television: aggression. Many people watch television to see dominance and fighting, which can clue

an audience member into who is being presented as right or wrong. A hoarder who is aggressive is standing ground for what they believe in or what they prefer to do with their things. But in *Hoarders* the tone is one of pity that signals weakness to audience members. This may make some audience members more likely to approach a hoarder in real life and suggest that they get help due to their weak nature. The transfer from moral ideas on television to those in society is the beginning of the implementation of moral ideologies as moral governance; the ways in which moral claims become planted in society aids in their future regulation.

Media conclusion

The media is known to be a great influence in current society in terms of morality and behaviour. Reality television is perhaps the most risky form of media for moral regulation because it is often interpreted as real-life but is usually sensationalized to some extent. The moral claims that are disseminated through shows such as A&E's *Hoarders* resonate with audience members. They see hoarding behaviours as wrong and identify hoarders as weak individuals who need help to correct their behaviour. The actions in reality television are actually invasions of privacy and create ideologies about what is not normal and not acceptable when it comes to keeping goods. These ideas are moral claims that reach the audience level and can impact society by suggesting hoarders are immoral people who need to be identified and assisted by any means possible. Later scrutiny by audience members in the real world creates a moral dialogue about hoarding that is disseminated through members of society, thus developing claims into an established moral regulation of all accumulating behaviour.

Self-Proclaimed Experts

A recent phenomenon in society is the creation of what is termed 'self-proclaimed experts'. This describes the commencement of positions of authority that introduce people as 'experts' on a topic. Their job is to teach other people in society how to do a particular skill, or to aid them while they are doing it. Although this may sound like a form of teacher or academic, the key difference is that these positions are not trained positions and are often for behaviours that have not previously required experts. They usually do not require a honed or extensively learned skill and do not require a specific type of education. Despite this, these experts are able to charge money for their services; even though they have no formal training, society sees them as legitimate experts in their field. This type of category includes personal trainers, party planners, life tutors, and academic coaches. Many areas that have become problematized in society have made space for a self-proclaimed expert, including hoarding. Self-proclaimed experts add an interesting facet to moral regulation because their hireable skills signal a right and wrong way of doing things where before there was none. The presence of a self-proclaimed expert suggests that the person was doing things the wrong way and needed assistance to correct their behaviour, despite the behaviour having no previous regulation on it. The skills that end up requiring self-proclaimed experts are picked in a subjective manner, often chosen for their potential for profit.

Professional organizers

The field of self-proclaimed experts has recently grown with the position of 'professional organizer'. A professional organizer is a person who has above average skills for organizing material goods in a living space. It may include creating or cleaning

storage space, providing systems of organization for paper files, introducing separate areas for children's toys or hobbies, and designating spaces in the home for particular goods. It may also involve teaching skills to others, including labelling and sorting practices. People hire professional organizers to assist them in organizing their house because they experience disorganization that impinges on their lifestyle, including losing items frequently or constantly being late because of misplaced items. They may however also hire a professional organizer because they were led to believe their living space was unorganized to the point that they needed help organizing it lest they be labelled 'disorganized'.

Professional organizers often proclaim themselves experts, but there are larger groups at all levels dedicated to popularizing the skill. Some groups offer training programs to new hires, others provide resources both to professionals and to clients that they are trying to help, and many have annual conferences to discuss different organizing practices. Many organizers are not just suited to material good placement but also to encouraging different skill sets to curb client disorganization.

The interesting aspect of all self-proclaimed experts is that their titles are not official; they come from the bottom up, not the top down. There is no regulated position title that is agreed upon by some type of expert. The individuals who call themselves professional organizers do so by themselves; there are no agreed upon tests to take and no superior above you to grant you the authority of the qualification. Anyone can label him or herself an expert in this area, and there is little skill standardization.

Also in common with all self-proclaimed experts is the previous lack of necessity for an expert of this kind. In the case of professional organizers, in the past people were

responsible for their own goods and standards of organization were not necessary. This points primarily to the presence of a new standard of organization that society has created as a norm. If you are below this standard, you require assistance from an 'expert'. This could mean that people are in possession of more goods than they can keep organized by themselves, and need to part with some goods to stay organized. It can also mean however that people think they are not up to the norms issued by society, and they fear the possibility of future embarrassments.

Professional organizers by nature impose moral regulation on their clients. The existence of the position of professional organizer implies that there is a socially determined way of organizing items in the house, and that there are understood norms about what is considered disorganized or clean. The position also implies required aid in the form of intervention to change behaviour. Ideologies that are conveyed by professional organizers are those of moral claims; they are disseminated through 'professionals' and appear legitimate to members of society.

Morality

In the case of hoarding situations, the introduction of a professional organizer can imply that the hoard is not up to societal standards, and change is required to be 'normal'. This signals that a moral claim of excess disorganization is present. There are several reasons why such an intervention is problematic: first, it suggests that only one form of organization is considered legitimate. If the hoarder has a system of organization they prefer, it is considered wrong. Second, it implies that disorganization is wrong and unacceptable in society. Third, it may suggest that personal behavioural changes are

required in order to be accepted by society, signalling to the hoarder that it is not just their behaviour but also their individual selves that are in need of major changes.

The presence of professional organizers works as another authority that can disseminate ideologies about cleanliness and organization. For hoarders, they become another figure who may attempt to regulate behaviour in the name of normalcy or acceptance in society. The increase of this type of self-proclaimed expert suggests the rising moral ideas about hoarding as an unacceptable behaviour in society.

Self-Help Literature

Another form of moral claims dissemination is found in the self-help literature. Self-help is described as a process wherein an individual has access to information that they can use to change their own behaviour. It exists most often in book format, but can also be found as recordings, online blogs, and videos or webinars. There are many types of claimants involved in disseminating self-help. Some are legitimated experts in the field including medical personnel such as psychiatrists or psychologists, or are from the field of health and wellness including biologists, kinesiologists, or nutritionists. Others are non-legitimated figures such as TV personalities or other pop culture figures, but the list also includes members of the general population.

Self-help literature on hoarding is a fairly recent phenomenon. The genre started out as organization or clutter assistance, or an aid to reduce excess shopping practices. However, the increasing media coverage on the topic has produced a plethora of information for self-help with hoarding. Initially they began being written from the medical perspective by psychologists; however the popularity of the topic has seen books published by television personalities (including the cast of *Hoarders*), members of

organizations that deal with clutter, and waste management personnel. Most literature deals initially with the reader identifying and accepting himself or herself as a 'hoarder', and then progresses through several chapters that encourage the hoarder to become organized and part with goods in a step-by-step process.

The hoarding literature that is provided in the form of self-help immediately signals to a person that hoarding is a behaviour that requires assistance. The idea of assistance is placed in the title of the genre: 'self-help'. Thus it is implied that one seeks this type of information to assist in changing their behaviour. For some it may be a welcome guide to changing habits, but to others the presence of this type of literature may cause a reader to become ashamed of their practices. It may also encourage those who accumulate to distance themselves from other society members due to the possibility of being ousted as a hoarder. While self-help literature may provide some people with relief, the presence of it in our society draws attention to the many ways that members in society may consider behaviour to be wrong. It works as a tool of moral regulation because it signals a bad or disagreeable behaviour and then provides an acceptable alternative. This form is interesting because it does not require person-to-person contact; self-help exists in a consumable object form that the hoarder can interact with by themselves¹³. This causes the moral claim to become self-regulated; instead of relying on claimants to disseminate information to the hoarder to regulate them, the claimants have created a system wherein the hoarder self-regulates to change their behaviour without interference from an outside force. This draws attention to the detrimental nature of social

¹³ Interestingly, many hoarders hoard self-help books on hoarding. The book becomes an object that is consumed like all other objects, which means it often ends up unused in a pile in the household.

problems that are morally regulated; there is not enough information presented to make an informed decision about the behaviour, and so people follow social cues. When these cues are self-imposed they become harmful to the health and happiness of other people. Self-regulation of hoarding behaviours may create emotional distress for people who have non-severe hoarding behaviours, and may cause distancing from family and friends. The availability of unregulated self-help books on hoarding draws attention to the variety of claims available and the ways in which they are easily legitimated.

Concluding Remarks

The various formats that claimants use to disseminate ideologies about morality affect its impact on society. The availability of media and its representations of hoarding are detrimental to society in that they portray severe cases while emitting the idea that hoarders require assistance whether they want or require it or not. The occupation of ‘professional organizer’ draws attention to the way in which society has legitimated certain forms of cleanliness over others, making people with small messes feel obligated to change. And the plethora of unregulated self-help literature draws attention to the ways in which moral regulation can be inserted into society so that people regulate themselves without having direct access to claimants. These forms of dissemination are important in understanding the progression of the moral ideology of hoarding behaviour.

The subjective claims made by various claimants about hoarding demonstrate that it can be considered a morally regulated behaviour. The ideologies of cleanliness and organization that are conveyed through the media, self-proclaimed experts, and self-help books suggest that moral claimants have disseminated their claims in an effective way. Moral regulation also mirrors a social problem construction; claimants use subjective

ideas to construct a discourse of harm around the presentation of household items. This construction of harm suggests that hoarding is a destructive behaviour that must be stopped and aided through intervention. The objective conditions of accumulation and lack of discard are not inherently harmful, but this construction of hoarding suggests that they are by creating a moral ideology about cleanliness and organization. The dissemination of moral ideologies must be identified when discussing social problems because they often greatly influence individual and social expectations. In the case of hoarding, moral regulation is a reality, but the ideologies are constructions that exist due to particular claimants. Hoarding is once again presented to society as wrong or bad due to the imposition of subjective claims. This type of presentation is important to consider when understanding social problem constructions.

CHAPTER 5: HOARDING IN A LIQUID MODERN CONSUMER SOCIETY

The above constructions of hoarding are developed in frames that emphasize individual conduct. They focus on the ways in which individuals behave in society and the subsequent reactions to those behaviours. While they recognize hoarding as a behaviour stemming from increased accumulation and a lack of discard, they look solely to the individual to explain why those behaviours are occurring. They then attempt to remedy the situation by either labeling the behaviour as a disease and prescribing medical intervention, or by encouraging moral campaigners to advocate 'normal' levels of cleanliness and organization to produce self-regulation. Both constructions suggest that the behaviour is wrong or bad and causes harm. Neither considers the social structures that may influence the behaviours.

I encourage an alternative approach to hoarding behaviour that adds consideration for changing social structures in society. I emphasize the relationship between the objective conditions of hoarding, accumulation and a lack of discard, and the current state of consumer society. Although social theorists have yet to make a connection between consumer culture and hoarding, both topics contain similar aspects of accumulation and discard. In addition to consideration for the objective conditions of hoarding, I add my own subjective approach that places hoarding within a liquid modern framework. The conflicts in space and time that constitute current society can be said to create conditions that are ideal for hoarding behaviour to occur, accounting for its increasing presence in society. This approach also allows for a questioning of hoarding's classification as a 'problem'; if the objective conditions of hoarding are naturally occurring due to societal changes, they may be considered less problematic than previous constructions deem them

to be. My approach provides an alternative social problem construction of hoarding that may have future implications for how society views the behaviour.

Objective Conditions in Consumer Society

The objective conditions of hoarding are those that are present in all cases of hoarding to some extent, and thus they must be included in any analysis of the behaviour. While most constructions of hoarding consider the objective conditions in relation to individual actions, I consider them in a larger frame of current consumer society. Both consumer theory and hoarding rely on accumulating and discarding material goods to describe what is happening in either society or a particular situation. The ideologies and concepts developed by theorists, despite having never been tied to hoarding, aid in describing the origin of accumulative behaviours that are both promoted and encouraged in society.

Accumulation

Consumer theory often discusses themes of accumulation when they consider the function behind advertising or the creation of false needs, but the foundation of consumerism go back to accumulation. Increased commodity exchange for profit was originally noted by Marx as capital accumulation: the process of increasing one's wealth (Marx 1967). This type of accumulation has since been overtaken by consumer accumulation, wherein the process of commodity exchange for profit includes consideration for the consumer. Many theorists have recognized different market tools that have led society to purchase and acquire items at increasing rates. Advertising is the most basic tool for increasing consumer spending: ads are placed in conspicuous areas to inform people about a product in the hopes that they purchase it. This leads to increased

spending on the part of the consumer, and eventually commodity accumulation. False needs also play a role in consumer accumulation by transforming wants into needs that the consumer believes they must have in order to survive. This type of encouraged accumulation is often the reason for various gadgets in the home; cell phones are rarely necessary but marketing tools have led society to believe they are imperative to survival in society. Planned obsolescence is an example of a more complex tool; it may encourage repeat purchases due to structural flaws but also due to small aesthetic changes. This encourages higher levels of purchasing which may lead to accumulation if prior items are not discarded. Consumer behaviours of accumulation are inherent in a system that encourages constant acquiring of goods. The connection between high levels of acquisition and high levels of accumulation is not always clear however; it relies on ideologies of discard.

Discard

Social norms of discarding are inherent in the same system that provides ideologies of acquisition; however consumer society simultaneously promotes both frequent and infrequent discarding. Frequent discard ideologies are again seen with market tools such as planned obsolescence; if the old item has broken down or is obsolete, it must be discarded to make room for a new one. This encourages a higher discard level. This ideology remains truthful for other types of 'need' or 'want' purchases wherein a newer object should take the place of an older one due to function or style; however it does not always result in high levels of discard. This is when accumulation occurs: high acquisition paired with low discard. In current consumer society, the decreasing levels of

discard must be accounting for. I believe this relates to the changing relationship between humans and material items.

Object relations

Ideologies involving signs, identity, and emotional attachment have all affected the ability to discard goods at a frequent rate. Many purchasing practices involve the consumption of signs, wherein it is not the actual use of the item that prompts the purchase but the sign endowed in the object that is sought. This means the purpose of the good is no longer its material function but a function more unique to cultural trends in society or to the individual that acquired it. Thus, the item no longer has its original material life; although it is non-functioning materially it may still be functioning as a sign for the individual, decreasing the potential for future disposal. This is especially true of items that are associated with identity building, clique membership or status symbols. Even if a constructed identity has been reconstructed and the items that aided in the display of that identity are no longer required, a person may still keep the items for emotional reasons because it would feel as if they were discarding their previous identity. The versatility of an object into a sign creates complications for a strict discard cycle.

Similar to the problematic nature of sign or identity embodiment in a material good is the possibility of an emotional relationship contained in a good. As mentioned, Arlie Hochschild advocates the concept of 'materialized love' to explain the complicated relationship between people and gift giving (2003). With the increase of material goods becoming substitutions for human interaction comes increased attachment to those goods. Instead of interacting with other humans, we interact with objects. This means many of our affections and emotions become tied up in material items, making them harder to

discard. These types of relationships are encouraged in a consumer culture, and thus the inability to discard is a part of the social structure we currently live in.

It is the process of increasing accumulation paired with more difficulties in discarding that creates higher levels of accumulation. Consumer society plays a major role in accumulation by advocating for increasing spending and acquisition of goods; however it also alters the meaning of objects and increases our interactions with material goods to the point where a lack of discard occurs resulting in accumulation. The link between consumer society and accumulation becomes clearer when encouraged acquisition and decreasing ability to discard are examined. From here it is clear to see how it is that social structures in society contribute to individual behaviours such as hoarding. If accumulation and inability to discard are promoted and encouraged through everyday consumer society, then it is clear see from where the objective conditions of hoarding derive.

Consumer society may aid in accounting for the social structures that affect hoarding behaviours; accumulation and discard practices in consumer society parallel those found in hoarding situations. This analysis is incomplete however because it aids in understanding where the objective conditions of hoarding stem from but not why or how they occur. The subjective aspect of my analysis looks at hoarding within Bauman's concept of liquid modernity. The changing concepts of space and time in current society help to explain the increasing occurrence of hoarding behaviours.

Liquid Modernity

As mentioned previously, liquid modernity is a concept that characterizes the current period of modern society. It describes how the current conditions of society are in

a constant state of change, revoking the possibility of a stable lifestyle with habits and routines (Bauman 2005). One of the major changes in liquid modern society is the characterization of time and space. Both of these aspects change in ways that create opportunity for hoarding behaviours to occur. This is due partially to the quick shift between modernity periods that society has been experiencing; people may be less able to adapt to society because of its constant state of change, but in liquid modernity this becomes even more difficult because of the contradictions that occur between time and space. Hoarding behaviours are especially vulnerable to these changes, possibly promoting the increasing occurrence of accumulative behaviours.

Time

Liquid modernity describes a constantly changing and shifting state of time. Originally created by Maffesoli, Bauman uses 'pointillist time' to describe the inconsistent nature of time in liquid modernity (Bauman 2007). The 'eternal instants' and availability of new beginnings make pointillist time a great environment for the development and sustainment of hoarding behaviour. Advertising and the needs/wants cycle are very effective during this period because there is little rationalization for consumer purchases. Questions about whether the item is really required for sustenance or if space is available for the good are never posed. Advertising is also incredibly effective within this time continuum because people are accustomed to making impulsive decisions based on sensory experiences. Billboards and radio ads can put ideas about purchasing into the mind much quicker than in previous periods because instances are never tied to futures. In this time, money is spent more freely because the future is of less concern; planning for retirement, a vacation, or even for a rainy day fund becomes less

likely because people are “focused on one objective – instantaneity” (Bauman 2000:120). Pointillist time becomes especially detrimental when the multitude of ‘anew’ moments that exist allow for a person to be constantly thinking about future acquiring instances much before the one they are currently in is over. This leaves them constantly in the beginning stages of accruing a good, never reaching the final stages where they may properly consume the good. Thus, this time period is ideal for hoarding behaviours to develop.

Hoarding in pointillist time emphasized constant opportunity for the hoarder to acquire items while never seeing the purpose of the item through. The hoarder is so caught up in the purchasing moment, the instant that presents itself with opportunity, that they buy without restraint despite having the best of intentions for the items. However, as soon as they step in their home, the potential for consumption or gifting that was contained in the opportunity disappears; the action of acquiring the item and the potential for using it never meet. This action brings to mind the hoarder who purchases new or used items only to have them stay in the shopping bag when they arrive home, piling up day after day despite often being brand new. Likewise, any intention to part with goods is only an isolated moment; a plan to carry out a major cleanup is impossible in this type of time continuum. Hoarding behaviours are amplified in a modernity that abides by pointillist time because the social world moves at a much faster rate than the hoarder can adapt to with their high rate of acquiring, and accumulation is a foreseeable result.

Space

When describing changes in space, Bauman references the changes between a heavy modernity and the current liquid modernity (Bauman 2000). Previous modern

periods were characterized by a heaviness and concreteness. Bauman's simple example revolves around the change from a commodity focused on hardware to software, but I believe his analogy goes further in understanding space in other material objects. It may be said that previous material objects contained a heaviness that corresponded to their physical usage as a tool. Liquid modernity however creates material items that correspond to variable ideas such as signs and identities, which were previously not contained the 'hardness' of a good. This means interactions with material goods have changed from stable concrete relationships with tools to liquid, fluid, changing objects that are harder to interpret and understand.

In the case of hoarding, space becomes a conflict in itself. For a person who is stuck between the hardness of a good and the subjectivities it contains, dividing the concrete aspects in life from the fluid ones becomes confusing. For a person who was accustomed to objects that are contained in concrete spaces, liquid objects that contain aspects of signs and identity are new and misunderstood. Acquisition of objects is a constant struggle due to the identification of the multiple fluid signs or identities that the object may contain while also containing its materialism. A hoarder may identify in an object multiple purposes or signs while a normal consumer, who has adapted to a liquid life, will only identify one sign or purpose for the object. This opens up the possibility of many more commodities being suitable for purchase. Purpose for consumption and end-of-life discard also become confusing for a person who identifies with concrete goods in a liquid life. For the hoarder this means emphasizing the continual concrete life of an object that others would deem garbage, or being unable to discard because the fluidity in the object makes it change its purpose.

Conclusion

Both time and space in the current liquid modern world can be contradicting aspects of everyday life. Current modernity exhibits instances of problematic contradictions that can be linked to hoarding behaviours. The pairing of liquid modernity and consumer theory presents an alternative frame of hoarding behaviour that considers how social structures in society encourage and promote accumulation and a lack of discard, leading to a connection between consumer society and hoarding behaviour.

A NEW SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOARDING BEHAVIOUR

My analysis of hoarding behaviour can be framed using a social problem construction approach. In this case, the objective conditions of the situation are valid because they aid in interpreting how hoarding behaviours came to be cultivated in society. Accumulation and the inability to discard are actually facets of the current consumer culture, which means that social structures determine certain individual behaviours. This approach to the objective conditions allows for a social consideration of behaviour, in opposition to the individual focus of the other two constructions. But the objective conditions are not sufficient to explain how we can interpret the behaviour as problematic. For this I bring in my subjective application of liquid modernity. The shift of space and time in a liquid modern world is different from one in previous 'heavier' modern periods, which causes contradictions for people who do not immediately subscribe to a liquid way of life. This is where I believe social structures and time and space meet to create space for hoarding to occur. In this case my claim would be that hoarding is a combination of 1) structures that consumer culture promotes including high rates of acquisition and low

rates of discard, and 2) the problematic nature of quickly changing liquid modern time and space. In my case claimants would be reserved to consumer and modernity theorists who can point to the nature of consumption in liquid modern times, which to date includes only Bauman. I believe these claims could be combined with those of ‘down shifters’¹⁴ or anti-consumerists who also promote smaller living spaces and secure local food systems. Many of these groups advocate owning fewer items and rejecting the current rapid pace of liquid modernity. These claimants would see hoarding not as an individual behaviour to remedy with social shaming or prescribed therapy, but as a reminder of the need to disengage from a consumer driven society. This rejection of liquid modernity consumer society may slow down time and space and allow for a return to a society that advocates long-term thinking and living. This approach to hoarding as a problem looks at very different aspects of the behaviour and addresses society as a major influencer of the situation, which changes the approach to the topic.

Is Hoarding a Problem?

Although my analysis presents itself as a social problem construction, I do believe there is room for consideration of hoarding as a non-problematic behaviour. If consumer culture and liquid modernity promote certain behaviours, they can be said to be inherent in current society. If the behaviours are prevalent due to changing social structures, there is a chance they are not problematic. There are a few areas that could be further researched to answer this type of question, including harm or danger, personal freedom/free will, and private property.

¹⁴ See Juliet Schor’s *The Overspent American* (1998)

Harm

Whether or not hoarding is an inherently harmful behaviour is yet to be proven. The abundance of studies that have been produced in the medical field suggest that hoarding is harmful in several ways, including general levels of unhappiness and health decline including obesity and chronic illness (Tolin et al. 2008). These are not causation studies however; they do not inquire as to whether hoarding caused these results, or if they were present before the hoarding started. Likewise is the case for strain on the welfare state; although some studies look at decreasing labour statistics and increasing use of welfare systems like unemployment insurance, child and family services, and Medicaid, they do not investigate if those services were being used prior to hoarding behaviours. Of course, these studies must again be considered with their methodological flaws in mind, including things like sampling bias. There is room however for research that measures hoarding behaviours against other risky behaviours in terms of health and wellness. In this type of study, intensity and onset of risky behaviour would have to be measured to answer if all hoarding behaviours are harmful or if a hoarding person is also prone to other types of risky behaviours.

Personal freedom/free will

Like many behaviours that fall into a moral regulation, hoarding can be questioned with regards to personal freedom. As long as society is promoted as a 'free state', its members should be able to retain a certain amount of autonomy with regards to how they lead their lives. Whether or not we consider hoarding behaviour problematic, there may be room for an analysis that emphasizes ones own free will to lead their lives in a way they see fit, which may include accumulating a lot of material goods and

infrequent discarding items. If an individual chooses to live a life they determine is in accordance with their own tastes and style, and if they are not directly harming another person, perhaps they should be left alone to continue in a manner that makes them happy. This type of argument may be made for those hoarders who are being forced by outside groups, whether family or the state, to clean up a house when they do not want to. This would also include those people who do not identify themselves as 'hoarders', just as people who have a lot of 'stuff'. There would need to be an account for other forms of inherent harm however, which makes the argument slightly more complex but still valid enough to investigate. Harm to other people or animals would force removal from the home, but situations wherein the hoarder is living without electricity or running water, or in a structurally unsafe home requires other kinds of rules about when a hoarded home is unsafe enough to warrant intervention. Likely this approach would have to come from legislating bodies who have the legal right to intervene.

Private property

This type of inquiry highlights the complexities of private property that may need to be addressed. Owners of their own property are often supportive of a lack of intervention on the part of others because they have paid for land to live on in any way they choose. Society is already beginning to see some changes with regard to law enforcement and private property when dealing with hoarding. There do exist municipal laws in some areas that can be used to enforce a clean up of property due to neighbourhood aesthetic standards if a neighbour is finding the mess a visual problem. But these laws also cover instances when items in a yard create a zone prone to insect and vermin breeding, or when the pile is so high it becomes termed a dumping site (Vincent

2010). The most recent concern in hoarding situations is the safety of emergency health personnel. Paramedic and fire respondents have raised concern with regards to their responsibility for saving members in a hoarded house. This concern comes from worries about self-harm during a rescue; some hoarded homes require climbing over piles of goods that may topple at any time, and some suffer from severe structural damage and could collapse. Recent attention has been turned to the increasing incidents of fire in hoarded homes and the increased safety risk to first respondents as well as residents¹⁵. In this case some form of regulation for safety personnel may be required. Some municipalities have begun compiling experts on the topic to investigate what kind of a response hoarding houses require¹⁶. These groups often involve rescue personnel, legislative bodies, medical personnel, and individuals involved in hoarding awareness groups. These types of coalitions are becoming more popular as the presence of hoarding increases, highlighting the shifting nature of the problem.

Similar Social Problem - Alcohol

The complex nature of hoarding as a social problem mirrors several other behaviours in society that have debated. Alcohol use is a social problem that has had several different claimants advocating multiple claims. Similar to hoarding, it has been considered within frames of medicalization and morality, and has had advocates from unaffiliated individuals to organized groups to state bodies, being both morally regulated

¹⁵ An analysis of fire incidents was completed by Gregory Lucini, Ian Monk, and Christopher Szlatenyi of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Although not published, the report suggests a high incidence of fires in male hoarded living spaces in Melbourne Australia.

¹⁶ For examples see the Task Force Listing at <http://www.hoardingtaskforce.org/taskforcelist>

and legally regulated through legislation. Most importantly, the problem has shifted stances various times, indicating the complexity of the behaviour.

Alcohol consumption is an interesting social problem that has been debated over the past 150 years (Valverde 1998). Alcohol has had many claims and claimants, all coming into and going out of style at certain points in time. One of the first major claims against alcohol was by The Woman's Christian Temperance, a group of individuals who grew nationwide in America. They worked in the 1920's to invoke prohibition of alcohol. It was their belief that men were needed for work to support suffering families and alcohol caused them to spend their evenings drinking in a bar, thus neglecting their work and causing money problems. This claim was a moral claim: a group of claimants determined the behaviour to be distasteful to society, and worked to have that morality spread through society. In this case, moral regulation came through legislation as prohibition was enacted. This did not last forever of course, as prohibition was revoked slowly yet surely throughout North America. Yet alcohol was still considered a problem in certain spaces and for certain people. This caused a medicalization of the act of drinking alcohol, known as 'alcoholism'. This term was intended to highlight alcohol's addictive nature and the detrimental effects it can cause. Alcoholism later found its way into the DSM-IV, solidifying its description as a disease (Valverde 1998); however current editions of the DSM do not list alcoholism, indicating the constantly shifting positions on the behaviour. Today support groups exist such as "Alcoholics Anonymous" for those whose drinking may appear to interfere with their life. There do currently exist certain laws; although prohibition is long gone, legislation dictates drinking age and distribution, and has written consequences for those driving under the influence or caught

selling to a minor. Moral claimants may have advocated these types of regulations, but they have manifested into a state regulation.

An interesting perspective on alcoholism is its designation as a 'disease of the will'. Mariana Valverde's analysis draws attention to the way that society's attention to alcohol is really an extension of an obsession with 'free will' (Valverde 1998). Individual freedom has been a facet of every debate on alcohol and is often tied up in the counter-claims that individuals provide. Questions of addictions tend to be tied up in personal freedom and self-control with moral regulation determining the boundaries on those acts. By drawing attention to ideas of freedom, Valverde demonstrates the way in which socially determined problems interfere with individual will.

The complexity of alcohol consumption serves as an example of social problem construction in much of the literature. It highlights the ways in which socially determined problems are constantly shifting between claims and claimants, and are always being reinvented. The complexity of alcohol as a social problem mirrors that of hoarding behaviour: both have been medicalized at some point, have moral advocates, are regulated in some ways by law, and deal with free will. The history of alcohol as a social problem gives insight into the ways hoarding may change according to the claims and claimants that are current in the social problems sphere.

CONCLUSION

Hoarding is a behaviour that describes the accumulation and inability to discard material goods; however its presence in society is multi-faceted and complex. Hoarding has been constructed into a social problem by medical and moral advocates who claim

that the objective behaviours of hoarding are harmful. Both of these constructions place blame on the individuals who perpetrate the behaviour and recommend intervention by medical therapists, professional organizers, and waste professionals. Hoarding however has links to the social structures in society. Consumerism encourages and promotes the objective conditions of hoarding behaviour through advertising and false needs, and discourages discarding by altering the meaning of material objects. The current state of modernity also offers reasons for the occurrence of hoarding behaviour; the contradictions between space and time in a liquid modern world are conducive to impulse buying and accumulation. This type of analysis of hoarding behaviour highlights the importance of considering changing social structures when analyzing individual behaviours.

A consumer perspective on hoarding emphasizes the need for different methods of researching the behaviour. Research is required to look at causal links between consumer activities and hoarding. More studies are needed to determine when and how hoarding is harmful, and discussions on intervention are required to make further decisions on the responsibility of the state. This perspective also suggests that there is room for an analysis where hoarding is not an inherently harmful behaviour, but a socially constructed social problem. The consideration of hoarding with regard to social structures provides a wider framework for the understanding of hoarding behaviour, and has implications for future research.

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