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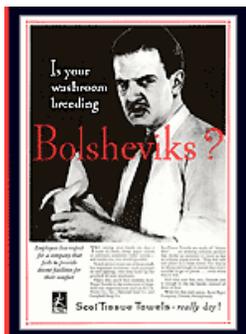
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How Compulsive Hoarding Can Threaten Your Health and Take Over Your Life

By **Emily Wilson, AlterNet**. Posted **December 9, 2008**.

The inability to part with possessions is often a symptom of psychiatric disorder -- and it's on the rise in America.

For some people, it's Civil War memorabilia, for others old newspapers and magazines, and for some old yogurt containers and plastic bags. Some of us might have a drawer or a closet filled with things we have been meaning to sort through, but for compulsive hoarders, getting rid of objects that seem worthless to others can be agonizing, and their stuff ends up taking over their lives.

Because of the piles of possessions they can't bear to part with, hoarders often can't sit in their living rooms, sleep in their bedrooms or cook in their kitchens. Many have a narrow path from room to room in their homes to navigate through the clutter. Often they can't find valuable items such as a check or a piece of jewelry. There are safety hazards, such as tripping over piles, or the danger of fire with stacks of papers and magazines all over the house. People who live in houses with excessive clutter are at risk of more health problems because of the dust, mildew and fungus that can be caused by the disorder.

Not much is understood about the causes of hoarding, which is thought to affect over a million Americans. Compulsive hoarders may have a difficult time getting rid of objects because they are anxious they will need them in the future, feel the items have sentimental value or do not want to be wasteful. Compulsive hoarding is often a symptom of a psychiatric disorder, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit disorder or depression.

Professional organizer Dorothy Breininger, CEO of the Center for Organization, recently spoke at the nation's largest annual conference on compulsive hoarding and cluttering, hosted by the Mental Health Association of San Francisco. She also appears in the new documentary, *Saving Our Parents*, where she talks about how hoarding can impact the elderly. She spoke with AlterNet's Emily Wilson about the difference between hoarding and clutter, the safety risks of having a house stuffed with junk, and how to help someone you think may have the disease.

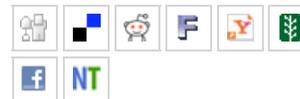
Emily Wilson: How did you get started working in hoarding?

Dorothy Breininger: I got a call in 2003 from the L.A. County Council on Defense. They were looking for someone to help this gentleman who was 76 years old. His name was Lloyd, and he was going to jail because he had too much stuff. He had 5,000 bikes and bike parts in his house, and he was sleeping in a reclining chair

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on the front porch in inner city L.A. And they asked me if I could help him avoid going to jail and avoid having conservatorship placed on him, and I said "Of course," and then they said, "Well, we can't pay you," and I really thought about it and said "Yeah, I'll do it." It took about eight months, and we met with judges and environmentalists and rodent specialists, and we kept him from going to jail. We got his house in shipshape. I kept saying to Lloyd, "If you would only clear the clutter, something good will happen in your life." And he started having people over, he wound up meeting people, he went to church and he wound up meeting and marrying his church sweetheart.

EW: What is it that leads people to do that? Why do people start hoarding?

DB: Often we see it in the senior population, and sometimes they start hoarding maybe after their spouse passed away. It's like a great big hug and provides a wall of protection to the outside world. That's one reason. Another is a serious illness. They can no longer function, they can no longer get out, so they stop going out, they start watching TV and collecting things. Another is they have no family nearby who can help them, and they go unchecked and nobody stops by to see what's going on. Those are some of the top reasons. And then of course there is OCD, which is obsessive-compulsive disorder. It's right there in the front lobe of the brain. Some of us are just more predisposed to being organized than others. It's just how our brains are designed.

EW: How can you help people?

DB: When working with hoarders and pack rats, it generally doesn't work for family and very close friends to work with the hoarder, because we feel that they should know better. They feel like, "Come on, don't be silly, throw it away, get rid of it." But we as professional organizers can go in there and treat their belongings with value and like it's important to them, which it is, without judgment. So how I do it is let the hoarder know that we're not going to throw anything away. I promise that I will not throw away anything, and that sort of disarms the hoarder and allows them to make the choices.

EW: There are different degrees of hoarding, right? What would you recommend for an adult child of someone who seemed like they're starting to keep a lot of stuff around?

DB: Well, what I would do rather than automatically become this judge and jury and saying, "Holy cow, Mom, I mean all these plastic containers? You'll never use them!" Rather than that, which is what most of us do, I would say something like, "Mom, wow, you have 50, 100 containers here. What is that about? Tell me about that. Do you use them? What is that about?" And really ask them. Generally, our parents come from a time when saving was a virtue. There probably is a good reason why they feel it should be kept. If we stop the judging and just ask, we'll get the information we need to know whether this is something that might grow into a hazardous situation for them or if it's just them being them and if they're a product of the Depression and so forth.

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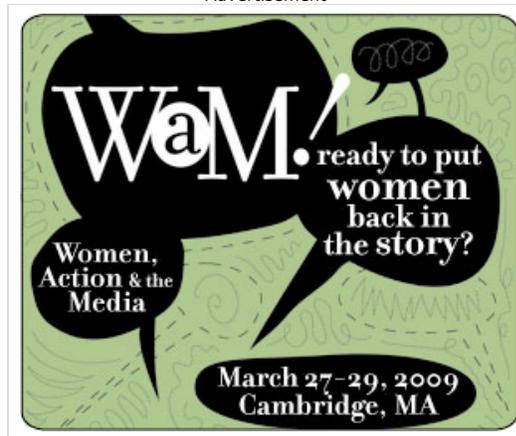
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Emily Wilson is a freelance writer and teaches basic skills at City College of San Francisco.

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Follow the Money Trail

Posted by: SpiderWoman on Dec 10, 2008 1:09 AM
Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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This sounds like the beginning of a viral campaign to create a new disease that can only be treated with a pharmaceutical drug. It's like the disease of menopause or old age (which now apparently requires treatment with statins).

Follow the money and you'll see that Mental Health Association of San Francisco is beholden to pharmaceutical corporations. Among its donors are AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and PhRMA.

Dorothy Breininger has created an image of a person whose function is the protection and assistance of the elderly. The reality is that she is selling overpriced photo album binders, organization techniques books, caregivers' schedule blanks, and the like.

This article is a crock! It's nothing but a shyster selling overpriced cheap products who has now found a new calling - shill for the pharmaceutical industry to hype a new mental disorder. Before long, there'll be a formal name for it and pills to treat it.

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- >> **RE: Follow the Money Trail** Posted by: realmuzik
- >> **RE: Follow the Money Trail** Posted by: SpiderWoman
- >> **RE: Follow the Money Trail** Posted by: TheLimit
- >> **Have you ever been in the home of a hoarder?** Posted by: Lizmv
- >> **RE: Have you ever been in the home of a hoarder?** Posted by: Pax99
- >> **RE: Have you ever been in the home of a hoarder?** Posted by: countingdaisies
- >> **RE: Follow the Money Trail** Posted by: opmoc
- >> **More to it than simply hoarding** Posted by: floridahank
- >> **RE: More to it than simply hoarding** Posted by: opmoc
- >> **The roaches and mold might actually be sustaining their existence** Posted by: zizzizi

» **RE: More to it than simply hoarding** Posted by: phatkhat

» **One of Our Friends Used To Call His Wife BLEACH** Posted by: opmoc

» **You're absolutely correct...crook of crap it is!** Posted by: donl51

» **RE: "Restless Leg Syndrome"** Posted by: Sushi

Pack Rat syndrome

Posted by: celebourn on Dec 10, 2008 1:14 AM

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Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Good points in your article! I was turning out to be a pack-rat like my Dad was (and I'm sure mostly because my parents went through the Great Depression and WW II). He had everything imaginable in the garage and basement. When my sis asked me what to do with all of it because she lives alone in the ancestral house, I said "Let it go! Let it ALL GO!" And she felt so good to get rid of all of it! And my wife and I just realized when we asked our daughter if she wanted our heirloom furniture, etc. etc., she said "Let it go! Let it all go!" I will never use or need or have space for all that stuff! So, that was a relief! Only a few pieces of jewelry and a couple of diaries remain, which are truly valuable. Especially the diaries and journals... what our kids should know about their parents' roots and early life in America. To all with a pack-rat problem, let it all go and experience the great relief of freedom and space! It's like moving into a new house without bringing along the old baggage. Of course, we don't bring stuff to the dump but to the recycling centers and junk shops. And unnecessary clothes to disaster-coordinating centers. Amazing what other people need (or think they need from our junk!) Especially young couples looking for bargains!

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Phew! Thought I Was Doomed!

Posted by: Lily H. on Dec 10, 2008 1:27 AM

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Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Wow, I thought I was a hoarder for sure until I read the last paragraph. I come from a family of hoarders,

my late grandmother and my sister, who have amassed volumes of stuff, everything from remnants from old businesses, to inventory from swap meet sales.

My grandmother owned two businesses, one, a restaurant, and the other, a second-hand store. When she closed the businesses, she rented a garage down the street, but still kept scads of items around the house nonetheless. My sibs and I were raised by Grandma, and my sister (and later, I) eventually started collecting items we just couldn't throw away.

My sister was far more involved than I, but ironically, as kids, she'd chide ME for having the messier side of our bedroom. It was when she moved away from home did she begin her hoarding habit.

In turn, I didn't get too into hoarding until I was a newly single mom with a large house, and no husband to keep me in check. Boxes of magazines and papers started appearing in closets and cubbyholes, and before I knew it, I had stuff galore. Every so often, I'd purge the entire house, but eventually it would start anew.

Ironically, right before I logged on tonight, I spent four hours clearing out junk just so I could bring down my Xmas decorations from the attic -- no room to put up anything on top of stacks of Oprah and Martha Stewart magazines, etc.

I work at a library, so it is tempting to bring home extra books and magazines we get on a regular basis. I have to restrain myself to keep from getting too out of control, but I have most of my books on shelves, and the rest in boxes in out-of-the-way places that don't interfere with traffic.

Though I live in a small cottage with no storage space, (except a patio where I keep several plastic totes) I try my best to keep the clutter under wraps.

Great topic! Can't wait to see what others contribute.

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» **So, do you or your family feel ill?,from hoarding "stuff"!** Posted by: donl51

This comment has been removed from the site due to non-compliance with AlterNet's community policies.

» **Oh, please. First somalia and piracy and payday loans, and now Victoria's secret?** Posted by: Beck

» **Is this Post Designed To Make People Throw Up?** Posted by: opmoc

You can't take it with you

Posted by: TheDreamer on Dec 10, 2008 5:10 AM

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Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I came from a family of packrats and did the same until 25 years ago when I was told i had 1-3 years to live, which certainly changes your priorities.

I offloaded almost 80% of my treasures through donations to charity, selling and giving away, and felt much better afterward. I enjoy traveling light, and am now in the next cycle of lightening my load.

We're all conditioned to think more is better through satan's little helper in the advertising industry, to quote Bill Hicks

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Organized hoarders

Posted by: Indiosmith on Dec 10, 2008 5:12 AM
Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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Emily Wilson seems to think that the world is divided into "hoarders" and "organized people." What she fails to realize is that organized people can be hoarders too. They just hoard in an organized way. In fact, a compunction to be organized can lead to hoarding. Organized hoarders accumulate a lot of stuff because they concentrate on putting things away in an organized fashion without asking the question "Do I really need this?"

Conversely, being disorganized does not necessarily lead to hoarding.

The critical factor in hoarding is the balance between perceptions of value and utility. Hoarders tend to think they should keep anything that once had value (i.e. it cost something), regardless of whether it has utility for them presently or in the future. Moreover, hoarders tend to give undue weight to the possibility that an object without current utility may someday be useful, hence should be kept.

The cure to hoarding is to reassess the weight given to these perceptions, lowering the importance given to an object's original value and raising the importance given to its lack of present and future utility.

A secondary issue for hoarders is the question of disposing of items lacking in current utility but retaining some intrinsic value. Hoarders are reluctant to throw stuff away that has some residual value, even if it lacks current utility to them. For them, the cure is E-Bay.

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» **RE: Organized hoarders** Posted by: Longdream

I come from a family of hoarders

Posted by: 2crazykids on Dec 10, 2008 5:41 AM
Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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My grandmother recently died and I had to help my mom out with the cleaning of her house. I won't even begin to discuss what was being saved (half used bars of soap from the '70's) because the number and variety was just too great. Underneath it all was mold, mildew, and rats. No wonder her health deteriorated so quickly. My grandmother was one of those highly-organized hoarders, everything had a place and it was all neat, but it was everything.

During that clean out time my mother was insistent on saving much of what my grandmother was saving (including the half used bars of soap from the '70's). I found myself just absolutely losing control with my anger at her for being so stupid...now I know that was not the right approach...

This problem is an addiction problem, and it is so pervasive!

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Fear

Posted by: henderson on Dec 10, 2008 6:00 AM
Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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Isn't fear at the basis of most "hoarding problems"? For instance, the guy with the bicycles that was mentioned - wasn't it his fear of not having enough money (he's going to repair and sell them for extra income) that started his "hoarding"?

And for some, it's nostalgia. I love to keep old things that my mother and grandmother used. It's like keeping in touch with my ancestors, in a way. I may never use them - or then again, maybe I will!

But for out-of-hand "hoarding", I still think fear may be at the bottom of it. There aren't many people left who've lived through the 30's depression, but most of them, after it was over, still kept EVERYTHING in case they (or someone else) needed it later. They had a fear of going without.

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» **RE: Fear, and knowing that there's no "away"** Posted by: Beck

» **RE: Fear, and knowing that there's no "away"** Posted by: VZEQICVA

» **RE: Fear, and knowing that there's no "away"** Posted by: Pax99

» **RE: Fear, and knowing that there's no "away"** Posted by: RM123

» **RE: Fear, and knowing that there's no "away"** Posted by: Tom Tele

HOARDERS ARE HARMLESS

Posted by: VZEQICVA on Dec 10, 2008 7:10 AM

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Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Most Eccentrics are happy and harmless and should be left alone. If a movie star collects alot of cars he has a hobby. If some poor person collects too many newspaper clippings he/she is crazy. This entire subject is very judgemental. Unless people present a danger to those around them they shouldn't be criticized. Maybe everyone in the Guinness Book of Records should be "helped". We should stop interfering in other people's lives and try to resist the urge to help everyone who doesn't conform to some set of rules. thanks, ANNA

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>> **RE: hoarders CAN harm themselves** Posted by: mullenhead

>> **RE: hoarders CAN harm themselves** Posted by: TheLimit

>> **RE: HOARDERS ARE HARMLESS** Posted by: willymack

>> **RE: HOARDERS ARE HARMLESS** Posted by: Pax99

>> **RE: HOARDERS ARE HARMLESS- I checked it out!** Posted by: VZEQICVA

>> **RE: HOARDERS ARE NOT HARMLESS! I LIVE IN HELL!** Posted by: joeocho88

>> **RE: CARS are INVESTMENTS! NEWSPAPERS are RAT and VERMIN HOMES!** Posted by: joeocho88

>> **RE: CARS are INVESTMENTS! NEWSPAPERS are RAT and VERMIN HOMES!** Posted by: Longdream

I'm a Genealogist

Posted by: ChapWriter84 on Dec 10, 2008 8:08 AM

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Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I'm a family treasures hoarder: letters, photos, papers, books, mementos. I base the family tales and histories I write on them. Who will keep these papers and photos if I don't? Still, as the piles mount, it's a problem. What to keep? What to toss?

I have a vivid memory of descending the attic stairs of the Victorian mansion we'd sold in the 60s. I can feel myself weighing the packet of letters from my husband: 1945-46, sent from Europe where he served during WWII. (Can you believe they were tied up in pink ribbon?) How I've regretted throwing them out!

Where would history be without our libraries and museums to hold collections of papers, books, and treasures? It's a problem for them, too, eh?

Chappie

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>> **RE: I'm a Genealogist TOO!** Posted by: joeocho88

My Hoarding Epiphany

Posted by: Reality Chick on Dec 10, 2008 9:04 AM

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Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I hoard condiments. I love little jars of artisanal jams and Italian tapenades and cherry chutneys. But I can't eat them because then I won't HAVE them.

So one day, I come home and bottle of artisanal wine I got in Sardinia a year ago...a bottle that I could not DRINK because then I would not HAVE, you see... had exploded all over my dressing room. I mean EXPLODED...it was a homemade wine and I guess the CO2 had built up enough to render it a projectile throwing bomb. Glass and sticky sweet Sardinian wine everywhere.

In that moment, I realized that by hoarding things, I would never get to enjoy them. If only I had drunk the special wine instead of holding on to it as a memory of an amazing trip I wouldn't have to pick out sticky shards of glass from my carpet and clothes.

Since then, I have opened and used the Currant preserves I got in Germany, the Ginger Biscuits I got in England, the herbs I got in a street market in Provence and the various other sexy treats I have purchased and then looked at for years.

However, I still can't drink the Port I got in Portugal, because then I wouldn't HAVE the port I got in Portugal. But I'm working on it.

Don't wait until the wine explodes. Enjoy life now. I am.

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>> **RE: SO BUY AHEAD!** Posted by: joeocho88

Thank you for this article!

Posted by: left-leaning-libertarian on Dec 10, 2008 10:12 AM

[[Report this comment](#)]

Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

My ex-wife was (and may still be) an obsessive compulsive hoarder. Her hoarding behavior may not have been as extreme as some of the cases described, but in this fairly large house it was virtually

impossible to walk from room to room without having to turn sideways because of all the "stuff" she insisted on keeping. She would also lose food and perishable things in the mess, which drew rodents and pests, caused the cats and dog to suffer from fleas and generally stunk up the place.

When she moved out in November of 2007 I spent several days loading a huge U-Haul with all the stuff she refused to part with, and there was a lot more left over! I can only say that the enormous relief I felt after her departure came as much from being rid of all that "stuff" as from being rid of her.

After getting rid of all the useless junk that was left, I turned my attention to my own stuff and culled a great deal of it; the more I got rid of the better I seemed to feel; it was like I was consciously re-claiming my space, saying yes to sanity, finding out how good it feels to breathe freely! In a sense, the physical clutter had been an outward reflection of the mental/spiritual clutter in our lives.

I've learned to be quite content with very little, have no great desire to fill up this house with things I don't need, and have never been happier. My cats are flea-free and generally much healthier as well!

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» **RE: Thank you for this article!** Posted by: TheLimit

» **RE: Thank you for this article!** Posted by: RM123

It's more complicated

Posted by: bluepilgrim on Dec 10, 2008 10:19 AM

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Current rating: **5** [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

There are reasons why I have stuff.

First is that I'm disabled so it's hard to keep up with tidying.

Second is the economy -- I keep stuff, including parts and materials to repair things because I can't afford to buy new things. Many of the materials I need to keep things together are expensive, if available at all. The culture is designed to throw things away rather than fix them -- try to get a coffee maker repaired when the thermostat goes bad -- or find a shop which sells one or will repair it. If you find a place to buy one or get it mail-order it with high minimum and shipping you get several and put the spares aside.

If the plastic piece holding the wand on your vacuum breaks (not metal anymore, so it does break) you can't buy a replacement piece (made somewhere in china), or it costs nearly as much as a new vacuum. Old-time hardware stores are replaced with franchised/corporate outfits which don't stock a lot of things. If you come across a free vacuum cleaner you take it, for when your current cleaner breaks, instead of buying new. When you are poor you hold things together by improvising and scrounging. You buy in bulk to save money, and store it.

Ironically, the throw-away economy makes it hard to throw things away unless you have money to keep buying new, and economic uncertainty makes one hesitant to throw things out -- especially things which were expensive but only lasted only a very short time: one thinks that maybe it can fixed or put to some use so it shouldn't be a total loss. The old junk yards where people used to be able to scrounge something they need are mostly gone or people can't go there, or it's illegal to pick trash off the curb.

When my roof leaked the only roofers I could find wouldn't do a repair but wanted to replace it for thousands of dollars, so I had to buy materials to do it myself, more than I needed, so I have the extra put by for the next time it leaks. When it's 'every man for himself' every man needs to have a lot of stuff around to be self-sufficient: a full complement of carpentry, plumbing and electrical parts and tools. A non-cooperative culture is inefficient.

Third, it's expensive and difficult to throw things out: a lot of things are 'hazardous' and the trash collectors won't take it (old fluorescent tubes) so you hang on to it waiting until there is some special drop-off scheduled. Recyclables have to be sorted and cardboard flattened. I'm limited fitting everything in a small trash can weekly, with weight limits, unless I buy a special sticker, or a \$200 dumpster. You can't take a whole day to tidy the house out because they won't take it all on collection day, and you can't store junk out in the yard. There are no 'junk days' here. The collection company wants to haul away as little as possible and makes it hard to put things out, or charges extra.

Overall, the current culture divides people into two classes: those with money who buys a lot of stuff, throws it out, and buys new, and those without who are trying to survive on less than they need by cobbling things together, and 'Use it up; wear it out; make it do' -- the maxim which was passed on to me by my parents and grandparents who lived during the great depression in the 1930s. Yes -- I do save my bread wrappers so I don't have to buy plastic bags.

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» **Thank you!!!!** Posted by: Tom Tele

» **RE: Thank you!!!!** Posted by: bluepilgrim

» **The suspect mental condition of the very wealthy** Posted by: pelican beak

» **Even the old newspapers...** Posted by: phatkhat

» **RE: It's more complicated** Posted by: Lily H.

A New Therapy:

Posted by: gellero1 on Dec 10, 2008 10:36 AM
Current rating: **2** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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GARAGE SALE INTERVENTION BY LOVED ONES.....

way cheaper than a shrink.....puts money in your pocket too !!

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» **RE: A New Therapy:** Posted by: RM123

I hoarded information. Books, newspaper clippings.

Posted by: nightgaunt on Dec 10, 2008 11:54 AM
Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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I also had video tapes going back to 1978 when I had my first VCR. I got ill and my apartment just filled with all kinds of other junk I was just too tired to get rid of. I fell so ill my family had to come take me out. I lost most things I had accumulated over a life time including irreplaceable artwork I had done. I am still not over it fully. I would have died in that mess. The illness wore me down along with my poorly paying job in a warehouse.

I am forced to live in a small room at my mother's house. [My worse nightmare.] She has discontinued the newspaper. She would continue it if I promise not to cut anything out ever. I had to decline. There are always items of interest, especially in science and history that I want as reference. Now if I could just move out again would be good. My illness and the economy are working against me on that one.

I have been working to pare down what I save. It is hard since there are certain books I want. DVD's at least take up far less space than video tapes. The internet is a great help.

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» **RE: I hoarded information. Books, newspaper clippings.** Posted by: kuro_neko

What about animal hoarding?

Posted by: doodledoo on Dec 10, 2008 12:17 PM
Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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Why is there no mention of animal hoarders in this article? They have the EXACT same illness as people who trap themselves into their homes with newspapers and old bicycles. But animals, unlike newspapers and bicycles, suffer the consequences of being under the care of mentally ill people who collect them like inanimate objects that they can't 'part with'.

I wonder if Ms Wilson or Ms Breininger have ever had to look at animals who are sick, malnourished, filthy from living in feces and urine, flea infested, overcrowded, feral, with infected wounds from fighting in too cramped conditions? I'm sorry. I just don't have the same compassion that Ms Breininger does when colleagues in shelters around the area have to take on the responsibility of sheltering, medicating and more likely euthanizing animals who are beyond help because of a hoarding situation. And I have little compassion for people who continually harm animals through neglect while well-meaning individuals want to patronize these people with 'understanding' and 'help organizing'.

I'm fine with professional organizers going in and helping people clean up their messes if indeed it is a situation where someone's living conditions got out of hand. Unfortunately, Ms Breininger is treating this as a personality quirk that can be fixed with diligence rather than a mental illness. And it's very easy to do that when the only thing being thrown away is junk.

The fact of the matter is that there is a high rate of recidivism for hoarders and collectors. This is a psychological disease that needs intense psychological treatment not dummy labels and plastic totes. Ms Wilson has basically interviewed a chiropractor about "back problems" when the real diagnosis is a broken spine. Ms Breininger is simply not qualified to deal with mental illness and the fact she doesn't even mention animal hoarding calls her expertise on collectors all the more into question.

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» **RE: What about animal hoarding?** Posted by: phatkhat

» **RE: What about animal hoarding?** Posted by: doodledoo

» **RE: What about animal hoarding? IT'S CALLED "COLLECTING"** Posted by: joeocho88

Other aspects of this clutter/hoarding issue ..

Posted by: TheLimit on Dec 10, 2008 3:54 PM
Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

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The last few years it seems like there has been a lot of pressure for people to 'get rid' of their 'stuff'.

At first it just seemed like more power freaks sounding off, but the thing doesn't seem to want to go away. And it seems to me that the anti clutter thing is a kind of sickness itself.

Why should people worry themselves about what others own, or whether they live amid clutter? What

business is it of theirs?

It seems to me that some of it is due to the minimum-literacy society, which views books, newspapers and magazines themselves as clutter. You can have a TV in every room, but if you have full bookcases, you are a clutterer, if not an outright hoarder. What use could a person possibly have for a couple thousand books?

And no doubt we are living in the ultimate throw away culture, where, as a poster upthread observed, it is rarely practical to try to fix something that is broken, even if you can find someone willing and able to do the job. If it breaks, quit working, gets scratched .. throw it out. The more stuff you throw out, the more stuff you have to replace.

Such a deal ..!

The bottom line is this: it's none of anybody's business if I want to keep old artwork, craft materials, all the books I like to re-read every few years, the musical instruments I haven't played in a while but hope to get back to, or any other personal possessions I have acquired over a lifetime. The issue isn't that I'm using them now, or expect to use them again, it's that those things are mine, and you have no jurisdiction over them. In time I will no doubt be willing to part with some of them, but I will decide which and when and whether the thing should be sold, freecycled or burned.

Any of you who might be having trouble with this pretty rigid viewpoint might consider it from this perspective: people who have no right to possessions are slaves.

Is that where you'd like to go?

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>> **There's a difference between being frugal or collecting and hoarding.** Posted by: doodleddoo

>> **RE: Other aspects of this clutter/hoarding issue ..** Posted by: mullenhead

huge difference between collecting and hoarding

Posted by: veggiegrrrl on Dec 10, 2008 5:57 PM

[[Report this comment](#)]

Current rating: [4](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

a crazy friend of mine has 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, etc...calendars on his WALLS...the cheap ugly ones you get from your insurance agent! he has piles of old newspapers since 1986 all over his laundry room. the dining room table is stacked to the ceiling with old torn, stained clothes and plastic garbage bags. his bathroom counter has pieces of sponges he's saved- his closets have more clothes than ROSS stuffed in so tightly. he has broken pieces of electronics we haven't had since reagan was president. his apartment is full of dust and mold it's nearly impossible to breathe. you can only get thru rooms in tiny pathways. he has receipts over everything he ever bought going back to 1985...including receipts for little things like a pack of gum and a soda. MOLDY. DUSTY. deranged. i offered to clean it all up for free but he refused. it IS a disease.

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>> **RE: YOU BET IT IS A DISEASE -- A SERIOUS PSYCHIATRIC DISEASE!** Posted by: joeocho88

>> **joeocho88 - can you move out!?!?!?** Posted by: veggiegrrrl

Thank you for writing this

Posted by: RM123 on Dec 10, 2008 7:11 PM

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Current rating: [5](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

My marriage was destroyed by my husband's hoarding. It is no myth. It is no crock of shit.

My husband stuffed our home with junk, wall to wall, almost floor to ceiling. There were little tunnels through the junk to get to the toilet, stove, fridge, and bed. I am not talking about "messiness" or "clutter." I am talking about psychotic slovenliness. If you ever had to live with such a person, you would know that this is no made-up mental illness.

It has become such a problem that New York City has had to set up an entire commission to deal with hoarders who create a health, safety and fire hazard in apartment buildings.

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>> **RE: AMEN!** Posted by: joeocho88

>> **RE: AMEN!** Posted by: RM123

Terrible Article, Says Nothing Really

Posted by: cherylholmes on Dec 10, 2008 8:26 PM

[[Report this comment](#)]

Current rating: [1](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

The author and the people in this article really haven't a clue about how severe the hoarding problem really is and how VERY sick these people are. They didn't mention the worse kind of hoarding...ANIMAL HOARDING...masquerading as animal rescuers, hoarding to "save them from euth" except these hoarder inflict a far more painful, lingering, torturous life on these animals than euthing them would have ever done. Many animals have to be euthd if the hoarder ends up getting shutdown for cruelty..the animals are starving, needing vet care and in the worst imaginable state.

You bust them, take the animals away, they move and start all over again...horrible..

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>> **RE: I LIVE WITH THIS PROBLEM! I HATE NEWSPAPERS,MAGAZINE, BOOKS...** Posted by: joeocho88

I WISH WE HAD COMMISSIONS IN TEXAS WHO DEALT WITH HOARDERS !

Posted by: joeocho88 on Dec 10, 2008 9:09 PM
Current rating: [1](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

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IT IS LIKE HELL! THE MOUNTAINS OF NEWSPAPERS AND THE HELL THAT YOU GET WHEN YOU THROW THEM OUT BECAUSE HE WILL NOT ONLY FISH HIS NEWSPAPERS OUT OF THE DUMPSTER BUT OTHER PEOPLE'S NEWSPAPERS TOO NO MATTER HOW FILTHY THEY GOT IN THERE.

HE WON'T LET ME DRIVE MY OWN CAR BECAUSE HE IS AFRAID THAT I WILL TAKE HIS NEWSPAPERS AWAY IN IT! HE HOARDS NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES AND WASTES OUR MONEY ON BOOKS THAT HE NEVER READS...

I HAVE TO TAKE THE PAPERS AND PUT THEM IN THE DUMPSTER WHEN HE IS NOT AROUND. WHICH IS SELDOM. HE IS A LIGHT SLEEPER AND IT BECOMES A BIG PROBLEM!

WE REALLY NEED THE MONEY THAT HE WASTES FOR THE BOOKS WHICH HE USUALLY GETS AT USED BOOK PLACES AND AREN'T THAT GOOD TO START WITH.

HE IS A RELIGIOUS FANATIC TOO...

HE DOMINATES ALL THE CONVERSATIONS AS WELL.

THE SCARY THING IS THAT HE WENT THROUGH A THOROUGH TRAINING IN POLICE ACADEMY AND PASSED IT WITH VERY HIGH MARKS BUT THE RELIEF IS THAT HE SUDDENLY DECIDED THAT IS NOT WHAT HE WANTED TO DO AT ALL. SO YOU WON'T BE SEEING HIM ON "COPS" ANY TIME SOON.

HE DOES NOT HAVE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN HIS PROPERTY AND THE PROPERTY OF ANYONE WHO LIVES IN THE HOUSE WITH HIM!

THERE MUST BE A NAME FOR THIS MENTAL ILLNESS.

IF I DIDN'T KEEP THE NEWSPAPERS HAULED OUT OF HERE, WE WOULD BE INFESTED WITH RATS AND MICE THERE IS A LOT OF NESTING MATERIAL.

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correlation and causation... oops

Posted by: DaBear on Dec 11, 2008 7:56 AM
Current rating: [2](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

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This just sounds like more owning-class, Oswaldian NLP bullshit pseudoscience crap.

As the screws are put tighter to the "lowers" the owning class who created this shit storm will wail louder: all you need is love, it's only money, clear the clutter, just believe, just name it and claim it....

Somebody's worried about blowback maybe? I dunno.

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>> **RE: correlation and causation... oops** Posted by: RM123

What it's like

Posted by: blank on Dec 12, 2008 11:28 AM
Current rating: **Not yet rated** [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

[[Report this comment](#)]

Along with the previous commenter, I too was married to a hoarder. Though it wasn't as bad as what she describes (that happened after I left), it was far more than most people would have wanted to be around. We're talking about an 800 sq. ft. apartment with one room (his study) filled with 3 foot high piles of papers, one entire closet (half of our closet space) filled with 15 manual typewriters (or more) that he acquired with the intention of repairing and selling, every bookshelf double shelved with books, piles of books everywhere else, and 5 bicycles (typically found in the garbage) that he sometimes repaired and gave away. This isn't counting the 10 others he filled the complex's bike rack with. That's just a start. He was really obsessed with getting used books, and though there was no shelf space (and less and less floor space) for more books, he always brought home a paper grocery bag or two filled with books from the weekly public library sale. It felt like there was no room to breathe, and he was not willing to modify his behaviors to make space. Yes, it got worse after I left, and he was unable to use his kitchen table and couch, along with half of his bed, because they were all piled high with things.

So the problem goes much further than simply having clutter, and it is hardly a pseudoscientific category. It's a real issue.

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Help for Hoarders - free of charge

Posted by: Alsu on Dec 14, 2008 1:40 PM
Current rating: [1](#) [[1](#) = poor; [5](#) = excellent]

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www.flylady.net has a system to get organized, get rid of clutter and get a home free of chaos even as a hoarder. It works! And its completely free of charge!

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