

“Hoarding Behavior & Attachment to Material Possessions”

Primary Author and Contact Person

Dr. Hélène Cherrier

Luiss Guido Carli University

Viale Romania, 32

Rome 00193

E-mail: hcherrier@luiss.it

Secondary Author:

Tresa Ponnor

Capsule submission: 20 mn length

Work completed in December 2006.

Original shooting format: mini-DV

Full credit for the video and manuscript: Helene Cherrier and Tresa Ponnor

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate consumers' motivation to accumulate obsolete items and their reluctance to dispose of material possessions.

Design/methodology/approach – The role of attachment to material possession in the construction of consumer identity provides a conceptual framework for the research. A video-ethnography with eight individuals, who classify themselves as functional hoarders, individuals who accumulate objects privately and are unable to dispose without clear conscious motivation or control, constitute the primary data for this paper.

Findings – In investigating the underlying reasons for accumulating objects and resisting dispossession, informants show evidence of being reflective consumers who perceive throwing away as a threat to memory, to security, and to historical and ecological preservation. First, this paper confirms current literature regarding the role of possessions as symbols of interpersonal ties with others and as a cue to past experiences. Second, the paper supports that possessions provide a sense of security to the owner. Finally, this paper reinforces that preserving material objects cultivate a vision for the future. Ultimately, informants' motivations to accumulate, to keep, and to not-dispose of objects reflects a desire to reassemble the fragments of their temporal experience into a unique space where memories, present, and life projects join together.

Originality/value – The accompanying film gives an opportunity for audience members to personally evaluate hoarding practices and to draw their own conclusion

on the dynamic nature of material attachment and consumer identity in terms of past experiences, present orientation, and responsibility for the future.

Keywords Consumption, Consumer behaviour, Consumer goods, Motivation (psychology)

Paper type Research paper

Video footage to support the content of this article is available at:

www.emeraldinsight.com/qmr-media

Introduction

The front yard is a colorful and joyful scene, with myriads of material objects such as a teddy bear, an old pushchair, and a chest of drawers. In appearance, each object lies on the ground without any use or specific aesthetic purpose. To this mere display of chaotic ownership, a man speaks of the aftermath of a successful trip into the neighborhood. His hoarding hunt brought back a diversity of objects that will be stored amongst numerous other material objects.

One can easily relate to the above-mentioned scenario. In effect, many people see traces of hoarding behavior in themselves. It is part of being human to store and accumulate things. It relates to our preservation instincts to hunt and to store items. In this study, hoarding is defined as the habitual practice of accumulating obsolete objects privately and the inability to dispose without clear conscious motivation or control. Historically, the term hoarding derives from studies on pack rats, known for their collecting behavior. Pack rats belong to the native family of rats and mice. They are known to collect and transport an immense diversity of things including pieces of paper, sticks, shiny objects and diverse debris. Their act of collecting, amassing and storing has been studied in the field of psychology and sociology under the term hoarding. The 1930's 'financial crash' left many Americans jobless, homeless, and penniless. The adoption of rationing and the fear of resource shortage influenced consumers to hoard clothes and other useful material objects in their homes (Stiff, Johnson & Tourk, 1975).

Developed as an American concept, the idea of hoarding has since spanned across countries and cultures. During the decade of the 1970's, the oil crisis led popular press to spread worldwide news on the shortening of natural resources. The increased recognition of the shortage of energy resources and its potential impact on the product

availability led consumers to accumulate and store large quantities of items ranging from wood to sugar and from paper to gold. Numerous stories on hoarders who accumulate objects in reaction to reported shortages are available in the 1980's popular press and academic research. For example, McKinnon, Smith and Hunt report increasing hoarding behaviors due to the stagflation period of the 1973-1975 and the fear of product shortage (McKinnon, Smith & Hunt, 1985). Specifically, their research positions the concept of hoarding as a rational act of risk minimization. For McKinnon et al., a person would hoard items when the risk of product shortages is higher than the cost of keeping inventory. The risk minimization theory explains the motivation to hoard specific items such as food in Poland in the 1980's or the toilet paper in the US when a TV report broadcasted a possible shortage of the product. Yet, the risk minimization theory does not justify the act of hoarding as a long-term habitual behavior (McKinnon et al., 1985; Stiff et al., 1975; Strahle & Bonfield, 1989).

Insights into the act of hoarding as an habitual behavior can be gained looking at psychological studies. Mainly, psychologists study manifestations of hoarding behavior in terms of dysfunctional conduct symptomatic of individual disturbances. As an individual disturbance, the act of hoarding is affiliated with OCPD, an acronym for obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. The syndrome named after the 4th century BC Athenian Diogenes who rejected all domestic comfort is "characterized by shameless neglect of the body and personal environment, hoarding, and the rejection of any help" (Herran & Vazquez-Barquero, 1999). Hoarders with OCPD cannot function within society (Samuels J, 2002; Saxena, Maidment & Vapnik, 2002). They are overwhelmed by their material possessions and cannot interact socially. Their houses resemble storage spaces where all types of objects, rubbish and debris

are accumulated. There is no sign of organization or any trace of control. A notable example is the “Bondi Junk House” reported by Australian Current Affair in January 2007, a house literally covered with junk from the ground to the roof. The extent and severity of hoarding behaviors with OCPD accentuates the phenomenon as a problematic condition for the hoarders and for society in large (Frost, Steketee & Williams, 2000; Frost, Steketee & Williams, 2002; Greenberg, Witztum & Levy, 1990). It is a nuisance for the hoarders as cases of sickness and even death have been reported. The Collyer brothers, for example, died in the United States in 1947 due to over-cluttered space. It is reported that their house contained 136 tones of refuse. One brother was buried alive when piles of rubbish collapsed on him, leaving his blind brother starving to death (Underwood, 2004). Overflowing garbage that harms residences is increasingly prevalent in newspapers and magazines. News reports often account of house fires caused by hoarding behaviors (Adair, 1997). Inevitably, members of society make numerous complaints regarding hoarders and hoarding behaviors, which may include odors and pest infestations (King, 2005). Frost et al., (2000) noted that neighbors, police and fire department officials most commonly lodge complaints against hoarders.

In the wake of several studies, television broadcasts and magazine articles that have reported the phenomenon of hoarding behavior in consumer culture, an increasing number of organizations and businesses are dedicating themselves to solve problems of clutter and foster resistance to unnecessary material accumulation. For instance, a non-profit organization named The Clutter Wizard provides a step-by-step method to clean cluttered spaces. The notion of material accumulation and unmanageability is explicit in numerous books on de-cluttering. Books entitled Clear your Clutter (Kingston 1998) and the New York Times international bestseller Organizing from

the Inside Out (Morgenstern 2000) illustrates society's preoccupation with clutter. More recently Alison Haynes (2004) offered Clean Sweep and Bernice Walmsley launched in 2006 her new book Teach Yourself Decluttering. In January 2008, a simple Internet search on Google produced 26,600,000 hits in 80 seconds when "clutter" is entered as a keyword in the search engine. The increasing number of decluttering sources in popular culture highlights issues relating to material accumulation (Belk & Joon Yong, 2007).

Despite increased attention to problems of clutter in psychological studies and popular culture, important aspects of consumers' motivation to material accumulation and reluctance to dispossessing have been neglected in consumer behavior research. Conversely, this study investigates consumers' motivations to accumulate obsolete objects privately and their inability to dispose without clear conscious motivation or control.

The Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the motivations to accumulate obsolete items and the reluctance to dispose of material possessions. The role of attachment to material possession in the construction of consumer identity provides a conceptual framework for the research. Phenomenological interviews with eight individuals who classify themselves as functional hoarders constitute the primary data for this study (see table 1). Functional hoarders are individuals who accumulate a large number of items that appear to be of useless or of limited value and have difficulties to dispose of such items without clear conscious motivation or control (Greenberg et al., 1990; Sookman, Abramowitz, Calamari, Wilhelm & McKay, 2005). In contrast to hoarders with obsessive-compulsive disorders, functional hoarders can interact socially with others; and their hoarding practices have minimal or no affect on their lifestyle (Frost

& Hartl, 1996; Strahle & Bonfield, 1989). For a clear distinction between functional hoarders, collectors and hoarders with obsessive-compulsive disorders, please refer to table 2.

A documentary film is one of the ethnographic methods applied in this study next to participation, observation, and field notes. Eight functional hoarders were selected using network enquiries and snowballing technique. The eight informants were approached in social circumstances and were selected on the basis of four main criteria: 1) they labeled themselves as “hoarders,” 2) they were able to maintain interpersonal relationships with others, 3) they did not express any definitive purpose for accumulating objects, 4) and they were willing to be interviewed and describe their “hoarding” experience on camera. The recruitment started using personal network, word of mouth and snowballing technique. The informants were drawn from across a mix of ages, occupations and living areas and none of them had prior theoretical knowledge of the hoarding phenomenon being studied. The sample size is appropriate to qualitative studies (Fournier, 1998; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Special attention was given in selecting functional hoarders rather than collectors or non-functional hoarders (see table 2).

A personal contact with each informant prior to the interview was carefully established during informal conversations. The conversation lasted around twenty minutes and took place in neutral settings such as coffee shops or over the phone. This first stage was necessary as hoarding behavior is often stigmatized with negative undertones in consumer society and hoarders can express shame or even guilt (Frost & Gross, 1993). The second meeting took place in the informants’ private space where personal objects were visible to the researcher. The interviews were performed in the participants’ workplace or homes, lasted between four to six hours and were

recorded using a video camera. Six interviews were videotaped at the informant's home and two were performed in the informant's work place. The in-home and at work interviews allowed observation and discussions of accumulated possessions that have been stored in the informant's living space. Each informant's private space delineates the spatio-material topography of the study but also serves as a symbolic representation of hoarding practices. As in Nigel Thrift's theory of space, the informant's private space is "porous," with no boundary to incoming memories, messages, or encounters (Thrift, 2004). The discussion in front of the camera emphasizes the 'materiality of thinking' (Carter, 1992; Thrift, 2004). The visual testimony prompted informants to describe their hoarding experience as a speaking subject and as a performing subject. As speaking subjects, informants used the first person to express who they are and who they are not; and as performing subjects, they spoke not only for themselves but also for their personal possessions, demystifying material division. As such, speaking in front of a camera allowed informants to connect different layers of their personal experience (self, others, the whole society) to the material world, which clearly helped illuminating the motivations to hoarding practices.

The interviews consisted of unstructured and open-ended questions to gain first-person description of the respondent's specific hoarding experience (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). Probing was extensively used to elicit a rich understanding on the informants' interest in their possessions and their reluctance to dispossession. The filming of the interview was fully explained to the informant to help discharge any negative emotions they might attach to it. At the end of the interview, release forms were presented to the informants to sign in order to avoid future copyright and ownership issues. In order to capture the hoarding phenomenon and to elicit emerging

themes the researcher noted down observations and interpretations after each interview.

The film is the result of two researchers' interpretation of the stories the informants provided. The interpretation emerged from a subjective process of hermeneutic analysis (Murray, 2002). This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of objects, texts, images and technologies in people's lives combined with the process of film-making and the researchers' engagement (Cohen 1994). A thorough examination of each interview was conducted through repeated readings of the verbatim transcribed text and numerous viewings of each tape. The editing software Final Cut Pro assisted in open coding by placing various chunks of video in different 'bins' (folders). For selective and axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984), various chunks of data were easily retrieved for analysis through different 'sequences' that were created within a project file. Similar to the comparative method described by Thompson (1997), the analysis consisted of constant comparison among informants. An understanding was formed and challenged through an ongoing process between personal interpretation and the informant's meanings. This hermeneutic approach (Murray, 2002) allowed identifying particular themes that individuals express in the context of material attachment.

Findings

The semiotic analysis of informants' accumulated possessions and the hermeneutic study of their narratives shed light on the unfamiliar phenomenon of functional hoarding: motivation to accumulate, to keep, and to not-dispose of objects. The main motivational themes uncovered during the analysis were: an emotional connection to the past (events, places, people, and craftsmanship), an orientation toward the future (responsibility for future generations, for the objects, and for the natural

environment), and a day-to-day adventure. The three themes mark functional hoarders' tendency to integrate a material dimension to their subjective temporal experiences. Each informant used material possessions to reassemble the fragments of their temporal experience into a unique space where memories, present and life projects join together.

An emotional connection to the past

“To me its like a photo, it’s a historical link to a time and a memory because we can’t remember everything, and when you see these things it just jogs your memory about something that happened in the past...[head shaking] again we throw away our memory. It doesn’t make sense” (Joseph)

The above quote suggests keeping material objects to retain memory and maintain a connection to the past. For Joseph, objects are the outlet or product of silent memories. They remind him of his youth, his time spent at his parents' home, or his trips to the countryside. Objects are the footprints, a visible indication for his trajectory on the planet. The importance of retaining objects as a point of reference to the past is vibrant in all informants' stories. Particularly, objects helped retain a connection to past events/places, to people and to historical craftsmanship.

Emotional Connection to an event/place

Informants' narratives show that objects embody a special event or place. Objects serve better than a mere photo in recalling memories. They instigate *“the same emotions (from the past) when you physically hold something”* (Melanie). For example, in front of the camera, Tom holds an eggshell and speaks fondly of the time he had chickens and one of them produced an egg for the first time. The significance of being able to hold the objects is evident in Tony's story. Tony left India 25 years ago to move to Australia with his family. While living in India, he was working for an

airline company. Interestingly, before leaving India, Tony did not take a picture of the planes that he loved working for. Instead, he shipped from the Middle East to Australia a 4.5-meter cardboard cutout from one of his company's planes. The object signifies the importance of preserving a tangible connection to his job in India. The desire to preserve memories using private and tangible forms led most informants to accumulate and store rocks. For example, Linda explains: "*Wherever I go, I like to pick something up like a tangible reminder of where that is. And as a result anywhere I go, I have now a very large collection of rocks.*" Similarly, Melany shows a rock from England: "*I've got a rock in my jewelry box that my husband brought back from England*" (Melanie) and Tom offers to the camera a display of several rocks: "*I'm keeping some rocks [from my trips]*" (Tom). In informants' narratives, a rock, an eggshell or other items serve as unconventional mementos to past events. The objects immortalize memories in a tangible form.

As objects are found to serve as vessels for memories, they are removed from the bounds of functionality. For instance, Colin and Jackie keep many vinyl records that can no longer play: "*I've got 78 records and neither of us have stereos that we could play 78's on*" (Jackie). When asked why keeping such a large amount of objects that cannot be put into use, Jackie responds, "*because they were things I heard all the time when I was a child...you grow up with these things, they've always been there, and to now suddenly throw them out – it certainly would be a very odd thing for someone like me to do*". Although Jackie acknowledges that she can no longer listen to the music from her childhood, retaining the object invokes not only the memory of the melody itself, but also the emotions she experienced as a young girl. Tom furthers the idea that objects are an emotional connection to past events by stating that even if his eggshell is broken, he will "*keep a segment of it*". The object, even broken, represents

an accessible visual reminder and a point of reverie as to Tom's trajectory in life. In all informants' narratives, the physical object plays a crucial role in cueing memories and emotions from past events. In addition, objects were found to be a reminder of some particular individuals that the informants have encountered in their life.

Emotional Connection to Others

Objects preserved in connection to others were retained as a memory of a relationship with particular individuals. The relationships ranged from close family members to respected acquaintances. For example, Tom keeps the tools from a man who used to mow his lawn. Although the man died several years ago and most of his tools are no longer useable, Tom insists that the tools are an enjoyable reminder of the past owner. Similarly, George states he "*wouldn't feel too good*" about disposing of the objects given to him by his father. Objects connected to the deceased, especially if few reminders were left of them, hold most value. For instance, Jackie was scandalized when she found that some letters written by her late uncle along with other family objects were going to be burned by a family member: "*These were letters from the front! (World War I)*" and Linda concurs by stating one of the most important things that she has retained is: "*an old bow tie that my grandfather had...I don't have many photographs of him*".

The objects kept in attachment to others, were limited not just to objects once owned by the loved one. For example, Colin expressed a strong attachment to tweed jackets. During the interview, Colin explains that numerous people, whom he used to know and love, wore this particular article of clothing. Consequently, he has acquired approximately 300 tweed jackets. Wearing and storing tweed jackets reminds him of his friends and family members. Similarly, Melanie has accumulated over 20 teddy bears during adulthood. She reminisces the first teddy bear given to her in the cot by

her mother. This transfer of meaning can be understood as processes of singularisation; where the shift of meaning and emotion between the object and the individual replaces the commodity (McCracken, 1986). Although objects were strongly connected to informants' life trajectory in terms of the event and the people they once known, they were also kept in relation to broader historical connections, such as craftsmanship.

Craftsmanship

In addition to preserving powerhouses of memories, informants kept objects that displayed craftsmanship. In all narratives, informants distinguish between objects from the past and objects from the present. Objects created in the 21st century are “*made by machine*” (Melanie) and often come from “*China*” (Tom). They are quickly assembled and “*break easily*” (Tom) to satisfy an “*easy come, easy go*” (Melanie) society. In contrast, the excerpt below notes that objects from the past carry the history and the human process of making the object.

“Unlike the piece that has been made by a machine, there’s no history attached to it, there will never be a history attached to it. It’s only meant to have a lifetime of a month or a year maybe, till the next fad comes along - as the fads I collect, which were fads in those times, have sustained time itself and are still with us, they’re with us because of likeminded people” (Melanie).

For the informants, craftsmanship is “*undervalued*” (Colin) by society. Hand-made objects should be respected because they “*are built to last*” (Tom) and because they can “*handle a lot more stress compared to products today, that’s something that can’t be replaced in a philosophical sense*” (Joseph).

The quality of objects works as a metaphor for a time when values were different; when things were handled with care, respecting material objects and time spent in

their creation. In the process of keeping hand-made objects throughout time, a different world slips into the hands of a hoarder. The mutation from past to present brings life to the object. Melanie speaks of the rarity of finding an object today that has “*been manufactured by somebody’s hand*”. This finding support Belk’s (1988) statement that consumers prefer craftsmanship to mass-produced objects as “it lacks the personal mana of its creator that is present in the original” (Belk, 1988a).

Objects are taken from their past and brought to life by the hoarder’s acts and memories. Hence, in conjunction with previous studies, the analysis of eight in-depth interviews with functional hoarders confirms that objects help define and maintain “personal archive or museum” (Belk 1988, p. 159), “providing a sense of permanence in the world” (Klein et al. 1995, p. 328). In addition to bringing past times into their private space, hoarders store objects to create projects for the future.

Orientation toward the future

The time that passes is not a programmed time. The future is uncertain and no one can predict what tomorrow will be made of. This ‘un-programmed’ time is what hoarders try to exorcise by materializing past times and transferring them into the future. For the hoarders, objects create continuities between past and future. They link the past to the future; providing a “temporal metaphoric” (Weinrich, 1973) for the owner.

Objects are kept so as to escape the uncertainty of tomorrow and are an expression of informants’ responsibility for the future generations, for the objects and for the natural environment.

Uncertainty about the future

The changes wrought by scientific-technological revolution and the spread of global capitalism has created what Beck names a *World Risk Society* (Beck, 1999). The insatiable expansion of consumer culture and the burgeoning of population threaten to

exhaust natural resources and aggravate global warming. A key consequence is the increase of uncertainty about the future. Individuals no longer know what tomorrow will be. This uncertainty is strongly visible in hoarders' interviews. Their narratives sprinkle with words such as "*You just never know*" (Meladie), "*I might need*" (Tom) or "*tomorrow things won't be there*" (Tony), which suggests that informants are uncertain about the future.

Everything from nails to old prams, informants see great potential in the objects they keep. Tony explains: "*Anything I see workable or working or made to work, it's in my hand [...] Tomorrow things won't be there, or I might not be able to afford a thing. It doesn't matter I've got it here. I might just have to go and look for it.*"

The relationship between material objects and security reminds us of the risk minimization theory developed by McKinnon et al. in 1985 (McKinnon et al., 1985). Informants stored multiple amounts of the same things as a backup in case of possible shortages. Tom explains: "*I keep six pans but will I take six frying pans (camping)? No, I'll take one*" (Tom). The behavior of keeping objects in reserve extends to some informants buying everyday necessities such as groceries (Tony) or toilet paper (Jackie) in bulk. However, this study extends McKinnon et al.'s findings to the accumulating any items in response to living in uncertainty. Informants were found to "*collect anything, whether it be books, or paper, you never know when you're going to need it*" (Joseph). Broken objects were kept with the aim of fixing them, converting them or "*getting this piece with that piece and making something else*" (Joseph). Hoarding objects provides comfort to each informant. "*There is a certain reassurance of coming home and knowing they're all kind of there*" (Linda). Melanie personifies this source of comfort by comparing her objects as being "*in the company of a friend*". In addition to hoarding objects in response to living in an uncertain world,

informants justified their behavior claiming to have a responsibility toward future generations, toward the objects and toward the natural environment.

Responsibility to the future generation

Informants identified themselves as “*custodians*” or “*caretakers*”. By storing objects over years, they preserve the past and pass it on to future generations. Hoarders’ engagement in the preservation and in the construction of history occurs for three main reasons. First, acquiring and storing objects from members of the family help maintain the family heritage. For instance, Melanie comments that her objects are her “*family tree*”. Consequently, she plans to pass them down to her grandchildren. “*If my grandchildren threw something away that I’d given them, that did have an attachment to, yeah, I would feel a little bit upset, not angry (pause) but I would have a feeling of loss*” (Melanie). Interestingly, informants invest considerable time and money to find the “right” descendent for the object. For example, Colin has made significant efforts to return items to family members. At times when it was impossible to find the “right” descendents, Colin gave the objects to the local RSL (retired servicemen league). Second, informants accumulate “historical pieces” in their private space for the interest of national history. For example George states that “*People give me things...I’ve had banners given to me, I’ve given those to museums*”. Jackie elaborates: “*Its not my things to keep, I’m just a custodian I think, it’s my job to make sure anybody that wants access to this material or whatever, gets them*”. When “*passing on the*” objects, informants are careful of who to give the object to. As shown in the excerpt below, the objects should be preserved and solely be passed on to “*the right person*” has been identified (Melanie).

“If I got rid of it, I would really regret getting rid of it because I couldn’t be sure that it had gone to the right person. It’s one of those pieces that really has to go to the right person...I’ll put up with the space that it takes, it stays” (Melanie).

Finally, an important aspect of being responsible toward the future generations is to teach others that objects should not be wasted or rendered unusable. For instance, Tony strongly refused to give away his possessions to individuals without making certain that the objects will be used: *“If it’s to be thrown away, I’m not going to give it to them. If they are going to use it, by all means, I would give it to anyone who would use it again.”*

Informants appoint themselves as having a responsibility toward the future generations. They have to ensure that the object is given to the right person so as to protect the family lineage, to contribute to historical preservation or to ascertain that the future generations will not waste the objects. This last aspect leads us to discuss informants’ responsibility toward the object itself.

Responsibility toward the object

Informants’ narratives portray a clear sense of responsibility toward the objects. Like an orphanage, hoarders’ homes are safe places where objects are saved from the outside world and nurtured until *“they go to a home”* (George). The affiliation between a hoarders’ home and an orphanage is explicit when Colin makes the reference that objects he rescues are *“like you’re children, you care for them, you nurture them and then you want to see them go out into the world”*. As Melanie explains in the excerpt below, informants are saviors, they save objects from the landfill with the hope to find a better place for them.

“You drive past and see something that is retrievable, something that deserves better than landfill, you may not need it, you may not know where it will go, but you just have to take it off the side of the road” (Melanie).

Melanie’s narrative extends the concept of caretakers to a humanitarian role. In this study hoarders rescue the forgotten or unwanted objects from a throwaway consumer society.

In addition to rescuing objects, informants expressed a strong responsibility toward objects that have served them. For example Linda finds it cruel to dispose of an old pair of shoes. She prefers spending money repairing the shoes than acquiring a new pair. She intensifies that *“The idea of jettisoning something that’s had long and faithful service and when it gets mucked up or a bit dottery. It seems a bit cruel to throw it out”* (Linda). Informants saw it as heartless or unkind to dispose of objects that served them. They realize that *“it may be personalizing the object a bit”* (Linda), but feels that if they live with something long enough, it becomes inseparable from their lives.

It is interesting to note that, although informants strongly express responsibility toward material objects, it was repeatedly observed that informants did not take proper care in storing and preserving objects. Some informants openly admitted their lack of organization. For example, Tony pointed under his house a number of objects neglected and easily subject to the weather conditions: *“If you look inside, this is no way a collector would keep these things”* (Tony). Similarly, Tom took his beloved mountain boots out from the shed where *“ little creatures are eating them”* (Tom). This is because of the *“practicalities of having life, of having two children and a job”* (Tom). In addition to feeling responsible for the future generations and for the objects, informants expressed caring for the natural environment.

Responsibility toward the environment

Informants expressed their concerns and sometimes their disgust of living in a throwaway society. As Tom, Joseph and George mention: “*We live a crazy, wacky society where they actually encourage us to throw things away*” (Tom), “*we’re just in a habit of throwing everything away*” (Joseph) and “*there is an aspect of conspicuous consumption*”(George). Informants claimed resisting the throwaway mentality by storing objects in their homes and by refusing the next “*piece of plastic*” (Melanie). Some informants envision a new society where objects are re-used. Tony elaborates that “*the world should stop producing anything at all for ten years, start reusing what we’ve made*”. This notion of recycling and re-using objects is exemplified in Linda’s difficulty in buying a new CD player even though her old one is not functioning. She uses her old CD player as a decorative item and comments that it “*just seems wasteful or too indulgent to buy a new one*”. Tom emphasizes this idea, commenting that society has “*lost the ethic of keeping things*”. Thus, most informants expressed a duty of keeping items so as to avoid waste.

Informants take on this “*self burden*” (Colin) to resist waste and to make sure objects go to the right person and place; whether this be a family member (Melanie) or friend (Tony), a stranger (Colin, Joseph) or to the museum (George, Jackie, Colin).

Informants resist dispossession and work against the current wasteful society in an almost rebellious and activist fashion.

Orientation toward the Present

Empirical studies on hedonic consumption highlights that consumers seek consumption experiences for the “*fantasies, feelings, and fun*” they deliver (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Similarly, positive feelings of fun, excitement, adventure and discovery are offered in hoarders’ narratives. This is an intriguing finding as the

practice of accumulating material items is often seen as disempowering or even enslaving (Elgin, 1981; Luhrs, 1997; Schor, 1999; Segal, 1999).

Informants in this study displayed and spoke about the utter joy they experience when finding, keeping and storing objects. They aligned their hoarding experience to an adventure where discovering objects and finding a purpose for the objects is the aim of the game. The pleasure and excitement felt by the informants when discovering a 'treasure' on the road or at a garage sale formed stories that later were recalled with joy. *"The adventures might be simple things like, retrieving an object ...and you had to get a mate and a bulldozer and a chain and it was raining"* (Colin) and *"I think it's a beautiful feeling, it's a childish sense of play or adventure"* (Joseph).

The "joy of hoarding" (Linda) refers not only to the self-satisfaction of finding objects but also to the satisfaction of saving objects and helping others. Melanie speaks of her house using the term "Aladdin's cave" where everyone can enjoy the pleasure of finding and discovering: *"I could lock you in here and you'd be amused, amused for weeks on end, just discovering things"* (Melanie).

Discussion

The increasing speed at which consumers renew their mobile phones, change the content of their wardrobes and modify the interior design of their homes attest to what John Urry names a "throwaway society" (Urry, 2000). In response to the increasing disposability of products and short-lived fashions, consumers develop efficient methods of dispossession including: throwing-away, garage sales, second hand markets or professional organizations (Belk & Joon Yong, 2007; Cherrier & Murray, 2006; Lucas, 2002; Roster, 2001). In contrast to accelerating "throwaway" practices (Urry, 2000), this study notes consumers' motivations to accumulate, to keep, and to not-dispose of objects.

In investigating the underlying reasons for accumulating objects and resisting dispossession, informants showed evidence of being reflective consumers who perceive throwing away as a threat to memory, to security and to historical and ecological preservation. First, this research confirms current literature regarding the role of possessions as symbols of interpersonal ties with others and as a cue to affective memories from the past (Belk, 1988b; Belk, 1992). Second, the study supports that possessions provide a sense of security to the owner (Belk, 1995). Finally, this research reinforces that preserving material objects contributes to the protection of the natural environment (Volkov & Scarlett, 1997). Ultimately, informants' motivations to accumulate, to keep, and to not-dispose of objects reflects a desire to position their self according to the temporal recycling of past, present and future times. Each hoarder narrative appeals to the weight of historical and continuous time, as opposed to the ephemeral and instantaneous time affiliated to a throwaway society. While consumer culture is increasingly identified with expectations of movement and instantaneity, hoarder practices emphasize the continuity between past and future times.

This conceptualization of continuous time provides alternative accounts, and responses to, material attachment. For example, Kleine and Baker (2004) comments that a relationship is formed with the object post acquisition. However, based on eight hoarders' discourses, a relationship with an object is formed at the moment of discovery. As the accompanying film indicates, informants begin to construct stories from the moment they are in contact with the object. At the stage of discovery, a connection with the history of the object is established and a relationship of either rescuer and rescued or discoverer and treasure takes place. Furthermore, a relationship can be formed without sharing a history with the object. For instance, informants

attested keeping objects that appeal to them on an aesthetic level. These objects were not kept to indicate social endeavour but rather to preserve the beauty and the historical craftsmanship of the object. This challenges a body of literature that endorses material attachment as indicative of social endeavour (Hirschman 1990). In addition, informants kept objects that were discarded by others. This finding challenges Belk's (1988) person-thing-person concept, where the reason individuals yearn for an object is due to a competitive relationship with other people who may also want the object (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988b, 1989). Finally, Belk (1989) comments that people are unlikely to be emotionally attached to mundane items. He states: "durables are generally unlikely to become a part of extended self the instant they are required" (p. 131) and Ahuvia (2005) adds that consumers only love a few things. This is questionable as informants were found to love everything including functional objects such as pieces of furniture (Melanie, Jackie), clothes (Joseph, Tom) and equipment (Tony, Colin, Joseph, Tom).

The use of video ethnography illuminated the dynamic nature of material attachment and its obstruction to dispossession practices. Belk and Kozinets (2005) state that video ethnography is used to generate "an intimate context in which to produce knowledge that is uniquely visual and cannot be expressed in spoken or written words." Thus, by witnessing images of informants' accumulated possessions, in conjunction to hearing their stories, a deeper theoretical understanding of material attachment was achieved. The accompanying film gives an opportunity for audience members to personally evaluate hoarding practices and to draw their own conclusion on material attachment (Frost, Kim, Morris, Bloss & Murray-Close, 1998).

In gaining an insight into functional hoarders and their attachment to possessions, an intriguing avenue for future research is to further explore these attitudes; the

motivations behind the pleasure and the responsibility derived from ‘holding onto’ possessions. Another avenue relates to consumers’ reluctance to dispossession practices. The idea of dispossession was a ludicrous idea to our informants. Tom looked in disbelief when asked if he plans to throw away his egg and Colin, Melanie and Tony add: “*Throw it away? No, that’s like the whole denial of the rational of why you collect things*” (Colin), “*You’re asking me to throw away!*” (Melanie) “*Why should I keep, just to throw away? Its just the opposite to what I’m trying to do*” (Tony). Each informant questioned the idea of throwing things away with a sense of disbelief, perceiving the notion as illogical, fettered and counterproductive to the process of acquiring. Further studies on resistance to dispossession would contribute to better understand consumer empowerment and sovereignty. Finally, informants were concerned with finding a good home for the objects. Further research in this area could enlighten new views on decluttering behaviors.

APPENDIX 1

Table 1: Informants

Name	Age at the time of the research	Professional Activity	Children
Tom	49	Artistic Director	2
Linda	35	PhD student / works casually in Retail	None
Tony	54	Aircraft Engineer	2
Melanie	57	Early Education Teacher	3
Colin	57	Bookshop Owner	3
George	45	Company Director	None
Joseph	51	University Lecturer	2
Jackie	53	University Lecturer	None

Table 2: Distinction between functional hoarders, non-functional hoarders and collectors.

	Functional Hoarders	Non-Functional Hoarders	Collectors
Definition	Individuals who accumulate objects privately and are unable to dispose without clear conscious motivation or control	Frequently associated with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD) (Hanna, 1995; Rasmussen & Eisen, 1992; Samuels J, 2002).	Collecting is defined as “the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences” (Belk, 1995)
Type of Items	Arbitrary Items: anything that can be useful in the eyes of the hoarder	Anything. Some are known to keep their own urine and faeces.	Accumulate specific objects that have a particular meaning to the collector.
Display	Private	Private	Public: Collections of objects are carefully cataloged and attractively displayed.
Acquisition	No active search. Acquisition occurs ‘by chance’	Unable to differentiate between collecting for sentimentality, monetary or intrinsic reasons.	Active search for specific items.
Storing	Lack of organization in storage.	Efforts to re-organize the acquisitions are resisted and touching of the objects is viewed as threatening.	Collections are organized in a recognizable whole, in an ordered set of connections (Bianchi, 1997). Establish links that “bind the collection together, be it continuity in space or time, personal memories, or aesthetic qualities” (Bianchi, 1997).
Dispossession	Reluctant to discard possessions. Avoid disposing due to sentimental and security based reasons (Furby, 1978).	Unable to throw away anything.	collections are “open to discoverable new connections and links” (Bianchi, 1997).
Motivations	Saving possessions is suggested to avoid the negative emotions associated with losing part of oneself or viewing oneself as wasteful (Steketee & Frost, 2003).	Associated with personality traits such as indecisiveness, disorganisation, perfectionism, procrastination, and avoidance (Saxena et al., 2002). Behaviour of those diagnosed with dementia (Hwang, Tsai, Yang, Liu & Lirng, 1998) depression and Anorexia Nervosa (Frankenburg, 1984)	Collections may be due to aesthetic, historical, or intellectual value (Muensterberger, 1994)
Societal View	Society is unaware of the problem, however close friends and family are aware and puzzled by the irrationality of accumulating numerous items.	Accumulates excessively, warranting intervention by community members or council to clear possessions.	Positive and supportive.

References:

- Adair, J. 1997. Sherborn home up in flames. *Boston Globe*, April 12.
- Ahuvia, A. C. 2005. Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumer Identity Narratives *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(June): 171-184.
- Beck, U. 1999. *World risk society*. Malden, Mass: Polity Press.
- Belk, R. 1988a. Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(September): 139-168.
- Belk, R. 1995. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*. London: Routledge.
- Belk, R. W. 1988b. Possession and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15: 139-168.
- Belk, R. W. 1989. Extended Self and Extending Paradigmatic Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(1): 129-132.
- Belk, R. W. 1992. Moving Possessions: An Analysis Based on Personal Documents from the 1847-1869 Mormon Migration. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(December): 339-361.
- Belk, R. W., & Joon Yong, S. 2007. Dirty Little Secret: Home Chaos and Professional Organizers. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 10(2): 133-140.
- Bianchi, M. 1997. Collecting as a Paradigm of Consumption. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 21: 275-289.
- Carter, P. 1992. *The Sound In Between: Voice, Spcae, Performance*. Sydney, Australia: New South Wales University Press.
- Cherrier, H., & Murray, J. B. 2006. Reflexive Dispossession and the Self: Constructing a Processual Theory of Identity. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 10(1): 1-30.
- Elgin, D. 1981. *Voluntary simplicity : toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich* (1st ed ed.). New York: Morrow.
- Frankenburg, F. R. 1984. Hoarding in anorexia nervosa. . *The British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 57(Pt 1): 57-60.
- Frost, R. O., & Gross, R. C. 1993. The Hoarding of Possessions. *Behavioural Research and Therapy*, 31: 367-381.
- Frost, R. O., & Hartl, T. L. 1996. A cognitive behavioral model of compulsive hoarding. . *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 34: 341-350.
- Frost, R. O., Kim, H. J., Morris, C., Bloss, C., & Murray-Close, M. 1998. Hoarding, Compulsive buying, and reasons for saving. *Behavioural Research and Therapy*, 36: 657-664.
- Frost, R. O., Steketee, G., & Williams, L. 2000. Hoarding: a Community Health Problem. *Health Soc Care Community*, Jul(4): 229-234.
- Frost, R. O., Steketee, G., & Williams, L. 2002. Compulsive buying, compulsive hoarding, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Behavior Therapy*, 33(2): 201-214.
- Furby, L. 1978. Possession in Humans: An Exploratory Study of its Meaning and Motivation. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 6(1): 49-64.
- Greenberg, D., Witztum, E., & Levy, A. 1990. Hoarding as a Psychiatric Symptom. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 51: 417-421.
- Hanna, G. L. 1995. Demographic and Clinical Features of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Children and Adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*., 34(1): 19-27.
- Herran, A., & Vazquez-Barquero. 1999. Treatment of Diogenes Syndrome With Risperidon. *Aging, Neuropsychology, and Cognition*, 6(2): 96-98.

- Holbrook, M. B., & Hirschman, E. C. 1982. The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(September): 132-140.
- Hwang, J. P., Tsai, S. J., Yang, C. H., Liu, K. M., & Lirng, J. F. 1998. Hoarding behavior in dementia. A preliminary report. . *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 6: 285–289.
- King, M. 2005. Pack rat or compulsive hoarder? When medical help is needed. *The Seattle Times*, October 5.
- Lucas, G. 2002. Disposability and Dispossession in the Twentieth Century. *Journal of Material Culture*, 7(1): 5-23.
- Luhrs, J. 1997. *The simple Living Guide: A Sourcebook for Less Stressful, More Joyful Living*. New York: Broadway Books.
- McCracken, G. 1986. Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(June): 71-84.
- McKinnon, G., Smith, M. E., & Hunt, K. H. 1985. Hoarding Behavior Among Consumers: Conceptualization and Marketing Implications. *Journal of Marketing Science*, 13(1): 340-351.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. 1984. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Muensterberger, W. 1994. *Collecting. An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Murray, J. 2002. The Politics of Consumption: A Re-Inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "speaking of Fashion". *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(3): 427-440.
- Rasmussen, S. A., & Eisen, J. L. 1992. The epidemiology and clinical features of obsessive compulsive disorder. *The Psychiatric Clinic of North America*, 15, Dec(4): 743-758.
- Roster, C. 2001. Letting Go: The Process and Meaning of Dispossession in the Lives of Consumers. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 27(2).
- Samuels J, B. O., III, Riddle MA 2002. Hoarding in obsessive compulsive disorder: results from a case-control study. . *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 40: 517–528.
- Saxena, S., Maidment, K. M., & Vapnik, T. 2002. Obsessive-compulsive hoarding: symptom severity and response to multimodal treatment. . *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 63: 21–27.
- Schor, J. 1999. *The overspent American : why we want what we don't need*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Segal, J. M. 1999. *Graceful simplicity : toward a philosophy and politics of simple living* (1st ed.). New York: H. Holt & Co.
- Sookman, D., Abramowitz, J. S., Calamari, J. E., Wilhelm, S., & McKay, D. 2005. Subtypes of obsessive-compulsive disorder: Implications for specialized cognitive behavior therapy. *Behavior Therapy*, 36(4): 393-400.
- Steketee, G., & Frost, R. O. 2003. Compulsive Hoarding: Current Status of the Research. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23(December; 23): 905-927.
- Stiff, R., Johnson, K., & Tourk, K. A. 1975. Scarcity and Hoarding: Economic and Social Explanations and marketing Implications. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 2(1): 203-216.
- Strahle, W. M., & Bonfield, E. H. 1989. Understanding Consumer Panic: A Sociological Perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 16(1): 567-573.

- Thrift, N. 2004. Movement-space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spacial Awareness. *Economy and Society*, 33(4): 582-604.
- Underwood, A. 2004. Hoarders Pack It In. *Newsweek*, July.
- Urry, J. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*. London: Routledge.
- Volokh, A., & Scarlett, L. 1997. Is Recycling Good or Bad - Or Both? *Consumers' Research*, 14: 14-17.
- Weinrich, H. 1973. *Le Temps. Le Recit et le Commentaire*. Paris, France: Seuil.