The Hoarding Project: Compulsive Hoarding, Families, & Communities

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Objectives

- What is The Hoarding Project?
- Who We Serve
- What We Do
  - Research
  - Clinical Work
  - Education
- Q & A
History and Background

Our Mission

The mission of The Hoarding Project is to change our culture’s understanding about hoarding behavior through research-informed therapy, education, and professional collaboration.

Through our work, we strive to gain understanding of the shared influences between people who hoard and their families, communities, and cultures in order to develop resources for understanding what hoarding is and how to work with the people who are affected by it.
Who We Serve

- **Public**
  - People who hoard
  - Family and friends of people who hoard
  - General public

- **Professionals**
  - Mental health
  - Related fields
  - Researchers

- **Media**

What We Do

1. **Research**
2. **Clinical Work**
3. **Education**
Research
The Hoarding Project

Study 1: Interview Study

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
  - 12 participants
  - RQ: "What is the lived experience of a family member of a person who hoards?"
- Themes
  - Lack of understanding about hoarding
  - Feelings of loss
    - Relationships
    - Sense of "home"
    - Future opportunities
  - Negative attitudes toward family member who hoards
  - Internal barriers to seeking support
    - Shame/stigma
  - Internal struggles with self
    - Interesting relationship with "stuff"

*In submission to the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*
Study 2- Family Member Group Pilot Study

- Evaluation of a pilot psychoeducational-support group for helping family members of persons who hoard
  - Ambiguous Loss Framework
- Recruitment and Screening
  - 6 week study
  - Participant make-up:
    - 8 family member participants
      - 7 female; 1 male; Ages: 28-65; Caucasian
    - 5 families represented
    - 7 children; 1 spouse
- Psychoeducation
- Mutual Support Group

Evaluation
1. Was this type of intervention helpful for supporting family members of people who hoard?
2. Does an Ambiguous Loss framework fit with their experience?
3. What type of recommendations can be made for this group in the future?

Article in submission.

Study 3: Internet Survey

- RQ: Are there relationships between unresolved trauma of past relational experiences and compulsive hoarding behavior?

Methods:
- Study Design
  - Internet survey- 20-35 min
- Recruitment
  - 330 people who hoard & family members of people who hoard
  - www.thehoardingproject.org

Analyses
- Structural Equation Modeling

Proposed SEM Conceptual Model of Attachment Representation (AR), Unresolved Trauma and Loss (UTL), Mental Health Comorbidity (MHC), and Family Dynamics (FD) on Compulsive Hoarding Behavior (CHB) with Latent Variables.
Future Directions for Research

Study 4: Theoretical Investigation

- RQ: Is the experience of family members of people who hoard fit the definition of ambiguous loss?
- Methodology: Delphi Method
  - Interviews of experts on ambiguous loss.

The Hoarding Project has an on-going interest in intra-disciplinary collaboration on research on compulsive hoarding and:
- Family relationships
- Culture
- Trauma, grief, and loss
- Attachment
- Other ecological contributors
- Family therapy and other relational treatments

Clinical Work
The Hoarding Project
Current State of Treatment Practice

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) shown to be effective intervention with individuals who hoard. (Steketee & Frost, 2007)
- Intervention program by Steketee and Frost (2007) works with the individual who hoards.
- Studies report medications to show modest or poor treatment outcomes for individuals who hoard. (16-17)
- Limitations of current approaches to treatment

New Direction for Hoarding Treatment:
The Hoarding Project Integrative Model (THP-IM)

- Bio-psycho-social view requires a more complete approach to treatment
- Integration of CBT with trauma, grief and loss therapy (Ambiguous Loss), with influences of:
  - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills
  - Solution Focused Therapy
  - Collaborative therapy
- Importance of a team approach for hoarding treatment
  - Professional team
  - Family team
**Ambiguous Loss - What is it?**

- A loss that is unclear, cannot be fixed, and has no closure.
- The loss can be physical or psychological, but status as absent or present remains unclear.
- Ambiguous loss has no official verification of status as a loss since final decisions have not been made. Much remains “up in the air.”
- Ambiguous loss creates complicated grief (no resolution); the complication is due to the situation of ambiguity, not personal weakness.
- Changing community rituals, no recognition of loss.
- Ambiguous loss is a relational condition, not an individual pathology.

**Two Types of Ambiguous Loss**

**Type 1: Leaving without Goodbye**
- Physical absence with psychological presence
- Catastrophic: disappearance, kidnapping, lost without a trace, missing in action
- Common: institutional placement, divorce, adoption, immigration

**Type 2: Goodbye without Leaving**
- Psychological absence with physical presence
- Catastrophic: memory loss, dementia, depression
- Common: homesickness, loss of way of life
Systemic Effects of Ambiguous Loss

- Immobilizes individuals and their relationships
- Conflict among family members
- Confuses decision making
  - Suspension of family decisions, i.e., future planning
  - Impact on sense of security, i.e., financial, relational, physical, psychological
- Freezes grief
- Blocks coping

Ambiguous Loss: Effects on Individuals

- Depression
- Anxiety, guilt, shame
- No self-care
- Somatic Illnesses
- Substance Abuse
- Neglect/abuse
- Confusion
- Worker Malaise
Ambiguous Loss + Hoarding

- Layered impact: Ambiguous loss is felt by the person who hoards AND family members and friends.
  - Unresolved trauma, grief and loss
  - Relationships are strained
- Understanding ambiguous loss can allow for compassion.
  - Tools for living with ambiguity

Collaboration Opportunities with THP

- THP-IM in development
  - Professional training
- The Hoarding Project (THP) seeks to work with individuals who hoard and their family members in order to help clients remain in supportive and cohesive relationships
- Desire to work with other professionals who share our values re: a relational focus as an integral part of treatment
Education
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Education for Professionals and Media

- Train mental health and related professionals to work effectively with people who hoard and their families
  - 3-level THP-IM training program
- Provide the media with accurate information regarding hoarding behaviors and the impact on individuals, families, communities at large
  - Consultation and education for local and national television networks, private production companies, etc.
Education for Clients and Communities

- Provide psychoeducation to people who hoard, families and friends
- Support groups
- Resources for families and friends
- Communication coaching

- Collaborate and advocate with community resources
- State and local hoarding task forces
- Training and education to non-mental health professionals

www.thehoardingproject.org

Visit our websites:
www.sampsontherapy.com
www.janetyeats.com

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Resources

