

PATHWAYS

A Hoarding Research Partnership Publication

2022
Winter/Spring

DIRECTOR'S CORNER



The Centre is a very busy place these days! Excitingly, several of our current projects are being carried forward by our graduate students—which is both inspiring and energizing. It's equal measure good fun and

deeply satisfying to facilitate and support these students as they embrace their emerging scholarly identity, explore their substantive areas of study, develop their methodological approaches and recognize the value of generating and transferring knowledge for practice.

Two senior students in the Centre are advancing their doctoral dissertation studies, one in the area of compulsive buying and the other in non-consensual community-based interventions for hoarding. Another graduate student has been instrumental in managing our research into community provider perspectives of hoarding. She is now turning her attention to leading the validation study of the current version of the environmental risk assessment for hoarding. Soon we will be ready to join with some of our community partners to field trial the new measure—look for updates in the next edition! Until then, keep well.

Christiana Bratiotis, PhD, MSW
Associate Director

RESEARCH UPDATES



People who hoard often complain that they have difficulty staying focused when decluttering, but is this because of basic cognitive issues with attention or merely a function of being in a cluttered environment with lots of possible distractions? In the fall of 2021, members of the Centre published new research in the *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders* that aimed to answer this question.

In total, 162 participants, including 61 diagnosed with hoarding disorder and 55 healthy controls, completed questionnaires and standardized tests of attention in either an ordinary testing room or a room with a clinical level of clutter (CIR of 4). Although people with more severe hoarding reported experiencing a lot of problems with their attention, in objective tests of attention using standardized tests, we saw only small effects of hoarding. Doing the tests in a cluttered room did not interfere with attention performance compared to the standard room. Although cognitive impairment may play a (small) role in explaining difficulty with attention in hoarding, we suggest future research investigate whether people who hoard have difficulty persisting through boring and emotionally taxing tasks as these may shed more light on the situations in which attention is impaired in hoarding.

You can read our full article [here](#) !



UBC Centre for Collaborative
Research on Hoarding

RECENT CENTRE PROJECTS



People who compulsively buy and most people who hoard are no strangers to bringing home more things than they need, can afford, or have space for in their homes. We are currently collecting data for the *Why do*

we buy? Understanding Acquiring study to learn more about acquiring. We have already found our hoarding participants, and we are now actively recruiting for compulsive buying participants.

➤ **Why do some people buy too much stuff?**

We know why people buy stuff, but we do not know why people buy too much stuff. Sarah is a good example. She is fashionably dressed and has shopping bags lined up in front of her computer, where she will film a video to show off her shopping haul. To her online viewers, Sarah is glamorous and her purchases are the envy of many. Sarah loves shopping – finding the perfect item after a long search and feeling a rush of excitement when stumbling upon an amazing deal. What Sarah’s viewers don’t see on screen is her financial distress, marital discord, and the regret that almost always follows a buying spree, some of the downsides of compulsive buying.

➤ **What is the motivation for this study?**

Research and clinical treatment for this problem is lagging – we need to change that. Most people only see the positive part of buying and miss the suffering behind Sarah’s façade. Compulsive buying is not currently recognized as a mental health diagnosis, and little research has been done to develop evidence-based treatments for this problem. Even if Sarah wanted to get help, very few clinicians are trained to treat compulsive buying. If she does find someone who can help, wait lists are long and the success of treatment is modest, at best.

➤ **How can I help?**

If you have problems with compulsive buying, you can participate in this study and be part of the solution. Participants complete a 15-minute phone call and an online survey that takes about an hour. For more information, please visit: <https://bit.ly/UBCBuyStudy>

STUDY RECRUITMENT



Attention Service Providers: this could be your last chance to participate in the **Provider Perspectives Study!** This study is intended for those who work in community settings and whose work often involves inspecting, assessing, or intervening in hoarding situations. The Provider Perspectives study is for professionals who encounter hoarding in the course of their work but who are not necessarily specialists or experts in hoarding (although experts are welcome to participate). The end date of this study is fast approaching, so participate before you miss out!

The study involves an **online survey** that takes about **30 minutes**. The questions focus on service providers’ knowledge and perspectives on hoarding and mental illness. Participants receive a \$10 gift card as thanks for their participation, or they can also donate the \$10 to one of the charities on our list.

If you are interested or know of others who might be, please visit our website at <https://hoarding.psych.ubc.ca/partners/> to register to take part in the Provider Perspectives study!

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Nancy Lin, MSW, RSW is a first-year student in the UBC doctoral programme in Social Work. Nancy has been a member of the Centre for Collaborative Research on Hoarding since 2018, joining the team before she was a PhD student. Along with her supervisor Dr. Bratiotis, Nancy recently co-authored a review article on hoarding disorder and presented a paper on hoarding in affordable housing at the virtual 2021 International OCD Foundation Conference. Nancy's master's thesis was focused on students' perception of evidence-based practice. Her

doctoral dissertation is focused on adapting psychosocial supports for people with acquired brain injuries, an area of passionate interest growing out of her experience as a healthcare social worker. As a graduate student, Nancy has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the JHT Falk Memorial Prize for "Most Outstanding Student in the Graduating Class of the MSW degree". Nancy's unique interests include trying new restaurants, spending time with her toy poodle Emmy, and taking naps. She would eventually like to retire in Japan and live in a traditional house with a built-in hot spring.



COMMUNITY PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

In this edition of Pathways, Simon Sheppard interviewed Ross Bartleman, one of our Centre's Lived Experience Advisors. Below is a summary of their interview.



Tell me a bit about yourself.

Music and theatre far outweigh anything else in terms of interests. I've been performing for over 50 years. I've done musical theatre, dramas, solo plays and produced a couple of shows. I've done a lot of volunteer work in the arts community, so that's a huge and important thing for me – and another outlet for me to express things rather than just carry them. My creative work also allows me to help other people who are facing similar challenges.

My partner and I also have a Schnauzer named Oliver. For me, my dogs have been a saving grace.

How long have you struggled with clutter?

It started about 32 years ago, after my mother died. I was with a partner at the time and that same year we split up. That was when I went over a cliff.

What is your relationship to clutter or stuff?

For me, hoarding is really connected to years of unresolved trauma and my refusal to accept my mother's illness and death. For many years, I told myself that it wasn't real, and that meant that much of my trauma was never resolved. So for me my things become a replacement for the person. Sometimes they even evoke the memories and feelings of that person because the things belonged to them.

I have paper materials, notes from way back when. I probably have 400-500 vinyl records and about 500-600 CDs. In my case, it's all material possessions. I'm very particular about cleanliness. There's no way I would allow trash to accumulate in the house – that's not something I would be okay with.

What interventions have you tried and what has been successful for you?

(Laughs) Many, many interventions! I've always read a lot, and I started reading a lot of self-help books. I've done support groups for loss and grief, hours and hours of individual therapy, and mindfulness training. The most critical pieces of learning for me have been a result of my exposure to DBT – specifically, how to practice mindfulness, distress tolerance, as well as emotional regulation. I've gotten to the point now where I try and do mindfulness practice every day, sometimes for a few minutes or up to an hour a day.

I just finished tax academy training, and I am now a poetry student in The Writers Studio program at SFU. So now I feel like "oh this is what a normal life is". That's why I think seeking out care for the [hoarding and unresolved grief] was a great decision.

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Tell me about your partnership with the Centre at UBC. How is it meaningful?

I took part in the Centre's hoarding intervention group with five other participants. We did a number of meaningful exercises together over the course of 5 months (both in the group and in our homes), and I think having people there for this level of support made it one of the most impactful interventions.

A little while later my contact with Sheila [Woody] gave me the opportunity to co-lead a self-help group for hoarders based on the book *Buried in Treasures*. That was also very meaningful to me because I'm interested in anything that can potentially help people deal with the disorder. It's also really great because even though I'm leading, I'm still learning at the same time.

What made you choose to get involved as a Lived Experience Advisor?

Sheila and I have been in constant contact, and she rocks! So when she asked if I would be interested in being a lived experience advisor for a research project I said "absolutely". I'm keen to be involved in helping create whatever solutions can be added to the toolkit. Overall, it's really important to expand the capacity to help more people, and that's something that can be applied to mental health more generally, too.

RESOURCES



In each edition of *Pathways*, we draw your attention to some resources – books, websites, or articles – on hoarding that we hope will be of relevance and value to you.

The Buried in Treasures Workshop is a facilitated support group that lasts for 16 sessions. Each session focuses on a chapter from the book ***Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding*** by David Tolin, Randy O. Frost, and Gail Steketee. Workshop activities include discussion; practicing non-acquisition, discarding, and organization exercises from the book; and completing homework between sessions. Here are some options for finding a group near you:

- Visit <http://www.mutual-support.com> to sign up for a virtual group.
- Search online for "*Buried in Treasures Workshop*".
- Search the "Find Help" section at <https://iocdf.org/> and send a message to support group contact persons about future offerings.

LEARN THE LINGO



In this section, we hope to clear up confusion about some commonly misunderstood terms and definitions related to the concept of hoarding.

What is Churning?

Churning occurs when a person intentionally moves items from one place to another in the home without ultimately organizing or discarding those items. Churning often happens because of difficulty making decisions. For example, a person may start to organize a pile of items, become frustrated when they cannot decide what to do with the items, and then put the items down in the same or different pile.

One strategy to address churning behaviour is to use the O.H.I.O Rule. ('Only Handle it Once'). This strategy helps to enhance self-awareness of churning behaviour and encourages making a final decision about items the first time they are handled.

(Adapted from IOCDF: <https://hoarding.iocdf.org/for-community-responders/information-for-professional-organizers/>)



ABOUT US

The Centre for Collaborative Research on Hoarding is a multidisciplinary group based in the UBC Department of Psychology. Faculty from the UBC School of Social Work and Departments of Psychology and Sociology work together with our community partners to better understand hoarding and to promote evidence-informed interventions to keep everyone safe and comfortably housed. Our research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and The University of British Columbia.

Director: Sheila Woody, PhD, RPsych

Associate Director: Christiana Bratiotis, PhD, MSW



Contact Us

Tel. 604 822 8025

Email hoardingcentre@ubc.ca

*Pathways Newsletter Contributors & Editors:
Peter Lenkic, May Luu, Nancy Lin, Simon Sheppard*