

# HOARDING

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## HOARDING

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Ethology

### 1. Core Definition

Hoarding describes an intense, persistent drive to accumulate and save resources, objects, or money, where the individual derives fundamental satisfaction from the simple act of possession rather than the subsequent utility or application of the items. This tendency often possesses a deeply compulsive, insatiable, and irrational quality that places it far outside the boundaries of ordinary prudence or thriftiness. When this behavioral pattern becomes severe, it is frequently classified as a personality or character disorder due to its debilitating effects on functioning and relationships. Furthermore, severe accumulation, particularly the hoarding of trash and useless objects, is frequently observed as a manifestation in clinically deteriorated individuals, including those diagnosed with certain types of schizophrenia and patients suffering from organic brain disorders.

### 2. Psychoanalytic and Personality Perspectives

The concept of hoarding was significantly developed by Erich Fromm (1947), who identified the "**hoarding orientation**" as a key character type. In this framework, the individual's entire sense of security is predicated upon their ability to save, accumulate, and own. This orientation dictates social interaction: the hoarder's attitude toward other people is centered on possession rather than genuine connection or love, and any form of personal intimacy is perceived as a critical threat to their carefully maintained internal order and control. The hoarding personality is typically characterized by rigidity, stubbornness, obsessive orderliness, and a pronounced preoccupation with themes of death and destruction, often at the expense of engaging with life and growth.

While this character type remains evident in contemporary society, Fromm argued that the hoarding orientation was far more prevalent and culturally supported during the relatively stable bourgeois economic environment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an era that heavily valued accumulated wealth and established material stability.

### 3. Psychoanalytic Mechanisms (Anal Retention)

Fromm's hoarding orientation exhibits strong clinical similarity to the "anal character" described by Sigmund Freud. According to classical psychoanalytic theory, the intense focus on the feces, which defines the anal stage of early childhood development, is later displaced in adulthood onto possessions, money, and other pleasurable objects. Consequently, the drives underpinning adult saving and hoarding are interpreted as symbolic continuations of the sense of power and control

first experienced by the child during the anal phase of psychosexual development.

The act of saving and hoarding symbolizes the initial sense of power the individual experienced when they willfully retained bodily wastes in defiance of maternal demands for elimination. These drives are believed to be particularly robust in individuals who developed a history of deliberately withholding feces as a direct reaction against a mother's perceived overconcern about elimination. Early childhood histories of constipation are often interpreted through this lens, representing both an unconscious attempt at revenge against the mother and an effort to secure anal-erotic gratification by forcing the mother to use invasive measures like enemas or suppositories. In this specific psychoanalytic view, miserliness and hoarding behaviors are seen as the adult manifestation of the infantile pattern of anal retention.

#### 4. Ethological Studies and Etiological Debates

Hoarding behavior has been extensively studied in animals, although definitive conclusions regarding its fundamental drivers remain elusive. The most well-documented animal hoarders are various rodent species, including squirrels, chipmunks, pack rats, and European hamsters. Beyond mammals, birds such as the California woodpecker are also known hoarders, drilling specific holes in trees to store acorns. Research has yielded divergent theories regarding the behavior's origin.

Some investigators, such as Morgan (1947), maintain that hoarding behavior is inherently **instinctive**, suggesting it is an innate, evolutionarily derived mechanism essential for survival. Conversely, researchers like Marx (1950) argue that hoarding is fundamentally **learned** through environmental conditioning and experience. A compromise position, adopted by Bevan and Grotzky (1958), suggests that the impulse originates from a basic **manipulation drive**, positioning the behavior as an intersection of innate tendency and learned refinement.

#### 5. Experimental Factors Influencing Animal Hoarding

Laboratory research has attempted to isolate the precise environmental and physiological factors that stimulate hoarding. Classic experiments involving rodents placed in controlled setups demonstrated that food deprivation is a strong trigger; Morgan et al. (1943) found that rats maintained on a restricted diet for a week or longer hoarded significantly more food pellets than well-fed rats, continuing the behavior even after they had consumed sufficient quantities to satiate their hunger. However, food deprivation is not the sole factor, as rats have been observed hoarding saccharin-flavored foods even when fully fed, indicating that strong food **preference** can independently drive the behavior.

Dietary composition is also implicated. The introduction of specific supplements, notably cod liver oil and lettuce, into the diet has often resulted in a reduction of hoarding tendencies, suggesting that certain underlying **dietary deficiencies** might act as a stimulus. In contrast, researchers have

found that the behavior is not consistently affected by other metabolic changes, such as injecting rats with glucose before a hoarding test (Stellar, 1943) or raising them on diets specifically deficient in fats, proteins, or carbohydrates (Bindra, 1947).

## 6. Environmental and Neurological Correlates

Studies have also demonstrated the importance of experience and environmental context. Holland (1954) showed that rats given prior opportunities for hoarding tended to accumulate more than control groups that were only allowed to explore the experimental environment, suggesting a learning component. However, other findings complicate this view; Smith and Ross (1953) found that mice reared solely on liquid diets did not differ in later hoarding behavior from those reared on readily hoardable food pellets.

Two critical physical factors have been identified: temperature and brain structure. McCleary and Morgan (1946) found that substantially **lowering the environmental temperature** increases hoarding behavior, suggesting a powerful survival mechanism linking accumulation to thermal regulation. Furthermore, neurological interventions have provided insights into the behavior's organic basis. Small lesions made along the midline of the brain have been consistently shown to reduce hoarding activity (Stamm, 1953). This observation suggests a potential involvement of structures like the **cingulate gyrus**, a region known to play a crucial role in motivational processing and regulation, in the complex system governing hoarding drives.

## 7. Further Reading

[Erich Fromm](#)

[Sigmund Freud](#)

[Anal Character](#)

[Psychosexual Development](#)

[Hoarding Disorder](#)