Hoarding: Buried Alive on DStv channel 170 has opened us to a world of compulsive disorders characterised by people’s obsessions to collect and their unwillingness to discard objects with seemingly little or no value. Graham Hill, founder of www.treehugger.com, is among those who think we are going overboard with the amount of things we own. He says: “We’ve got to cut the extraneous out of our lives and learn to stem the inflow. We need to think before we buy.” He suggests we should ask ourselves: “Is that really going to make me happier – truly?”

Thuli from Cape Town has a love for all things vintage. Every Saturday she makes trips to flea markets or charity shops to feed her desire for vintage-inspired decor items and clothes. “I just can’t stop. Even if I don’t have the budget for it, I still go because I know the goods on sale are quite cheap.” It started as a fun experience for Thuli, but now her obsession is bordering on hoarding as she never culs the clutter in her two-bedroom flat that’s overflowing with clothes, picture frames and dainty jewellery.

Compulsive hoarding has been linked with depression, alcohol abuse, anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, among other mental illnesses. In rare cases, the tendency to hoard can negatively affect interpersonal relationships, as well as put the home at risk through the possibility of infestation and fire outbreak. But there’s a fine line between compulsive hoarding and keeping souvenirs. Whereas it’s okay to hold on to your wedding DVD, stacking piles of old magazines is a warning sign.

After Siba’s dad passed on, her mom started collecting adventure books he used to read. “My dad was an avid reader, but he would donate or give the books away once he was finished reading them. After his death, my mom took his passion to another level. It started as something to remember him by, but then the act of buying books never ended. She’d always find a reason to buy one more book,” says Siba.

HOARDING: A DISORDER

SHOP-TILL-YOU-DROP LIFESTYLES and growing disposable incomes have given rise to a culture of ACCUMULATION.

BY LISA THABETHE
You’re less likely to second-guess an experiential purchase, the value of a material purchase depreciates over time whereas a skill you learn or a memory you have doesn’t, and you’re less likely to compare your purchase with other people. Richer experiences are likely to lead to lasting happiness. A new car might make you happy for a few months, but the memories of a weekend getaway will bring a smile to your face many years later.

In 1991, Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman conducted an experiment at the University of California to understand the psychology of ownership. A class of university students was selected – half of them were given university-crested mugs and the other half were instructed to either buy the mug from the first group or keep the money equivalent to its value. As the experiment progressed, it was found that the group that had the mugs tended to demand much more to give up the mug than they were willing to pay to acquire it.

This is known as the endowment effect, as coined by American economist Richard Thaler. When we own something, we mentally attach an “overhead on its value”, which makes it hard for us to make rational or objective decisions related to the object. This is why it’s difficult to get rid of things you own – they are not just things, they are your things. Regardless of how minor or minor the tendency to hoard is, what complicates matters is that hoarders usually have no insight into their own problem; either that or they enter into a state of denial in which they refuse to acknowledge what they’re doing is anything but normal. The first step towards a clutter-free home and life is admitting you have a problem and questioning why you feel the need to buy.

Asking yourself “Do I need this?” is not a very helpful question when trying to decide what to keep and what to discard. This is because your mind will give you enough reasons to justify keeping what you have, such as believing you may have use for those items you keep in the future, or attaching sentimental value to the things you buy.

Tom Strafford, author of Mind Hacks: Tips and Tricks for Using Your Brain, suggests asking yourself a question that counters the endowment effect. “If I didn’t have this, how much effort would I put in to obtain it?” This helps separate the things you think you need from the things you actually need. If that doesn’t work, you can seek help from a psychologist or counsellor to find the cause of your behaviour.

In the US, www. hoardingcleanup .com has a database of qualified hoarding specialists including cleaning companies, therapists and psychiatrists across the US that are familiar with the hoarding disorder.

In South Africa, you can visit websites such as that of the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (sada.org) to find a support group near you.

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**CELEBRITY HOARDERS**

**ANGELINA JOLIE**

has been collecting knives since she was a teenager. At one point, her interest in them veered towards self-destruction, but today, her collection is more for aesthetic purposes. She’s been reported saying she thinks once a person has children, their self-destructive tendencies must take a back seat. She now collects “antique knives from other countries.”

**DEMI MOORE**

collects antique dolls, which her ex-husband Ashton Kutcher called “creepy”. She owns hundreds of china and antique dolls, which reportedly are even kept in their own house, separate from her main abode. She said she plans to use her collection in opening a doll museum to the public.