

2015

The Hoarders: Material Deviance in American Culture by Scott Herring

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Recommended Citation

Hirsch, Mike (2015) "The Hoarders: Material Deviance in American Culture by Scott Herring," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 91: Iss. 1, Article 17.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol91/iss1/17>

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Herring, Scott. *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in American Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. xii + 185 pages. Paperback, \$25.00.

I have been interested in the concept of stigma for a long time. This began early in my career after reading Goffman's (1963) book on stigma. Stigma was central to my testimony in a federal civil rights case (Hirsch & Quartaroli, 2011) and it is a major topic in my recent work on people who claim to have had encounters with ghosts (Hirsch et. al, 2014). Criminologists regularly address the issue of stigma. Stigma is laced throughout the literature and courses on deviance.

According to Goffman, people can be stigmatized within three broad categories: physical and/or mental disabilities; tribe, race, or creed; and moral failings (transgressions of social rules - e.g., criminality, perverse – but legal – sexual behavior, crudeness of speech). Labeling theory (sometimes associated with Goffman) posits that few if any human behaviors are inherently deviant. Rather, deviance is based upon group judgments of what is or is not socially acceptable behavior. Labeling theory also posits that social judgments are not stable, i.e., what we may deem as unacceptable today may be acceptable tomorrow. Often changes in judgment are a result of the efforts of individuals and groups who work to change the definitions of social acceptability. In the parlance of deviance studies, those who advocate changes in social standards are 'moral entrepreneurs.'

In large measure, Scott Herring's work *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in American Culture* reads as a history of moral entrepreneurship. Herring, a Ph.D. in English Literature with an interest in material culture studies, set for himself the task of understanding "what made possible the condition of...condemning hoarding" (p. 3). To do this he draws on a range of social theorists including Alan Horowitz (2002) whose work suggests we look at hoarding as a 'contestable phenomenon'; Stanley Cohen (1972) whose work explores the way panicking moralists can define a condition, episode, or person as a social threat; and Michel Foucault (2003) who examines the ways in which psychiatry and police authorities often collaborate to define (d) anger and perversion. Social entrepreneurs in this story include psychiatry, those involved in 'standardizing collectibles culture,' the field of the professional organizer, 'hygiene reformers,' 'clutterologists,' and geriatricians. Often working in separate arenas and with different agendas, Herring shows how their works coalesce with the result of having 'hoarding' officially diagnosed as a mental disorder included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5*.

Herring brings history to life through the inclusion of high profile hoarding cases including the Collyer brothers of New York, artist Andy Warhol, and Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale. These cases range from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. Set within their historical moment, each case is analyzed by ideas prevailing at their time. The case of the Collyer brothers, who were found dead in their home surrounded by over 140 tons of collected items, is examined in relation to Thomas and Znaniecki's (1984) 'social disorganization.' Warhol's case is aligned with the post-WWII emergence of 'normalized collectibles'. The case of Edith Beale is woven into the emergent field of gerontology's study of successful aging and its obverse. They looked at the aged recluse 'surrounded by dinginess.'

This is a very readable book. The history is well documented. The case studies are blended with and informed by emergent trends in social thought. Herring left me questioning what threat hoarding poses for society. Is hoarding truly a psychological disorder in need of treatment or an overreach by a society inclined to see non-conformity in medical terms?

Regardless of the answer, hoarding has been successfully stigmatized. Like all manner of aberrant conditions today, it even has its own reality show.

Herring includes one final side offering of interest in the book's closing section "Note on Method." In this he asks and answers the following question: "How does one gain the conceptual distance needed to examine the taken-for-granted as something to be critically engaged?" He does this, he tells us, by drawing from "material culture studies, queer studies and...disability studies" each of which provides ideas applicable to this study (p. 143). This short four-page note is, in its own way, as provocative as the rest of the work.

This book would be appropriate for undergraduate and graduate studies in deviance and material culture. It is a must read for students of stigma and moral entrepreneurship. Students of public health and social work would also gain from reading this book, as would public health policy makers and professional social workers.

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