

Keeping your house in order: the business of clutter and decluttering in UK homes.

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Declaration



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

Consumption has become a defining feature of our age. Many more people now enjoy access to a wider range of goods and use their improved purchasing power to acquire them. When exercised to excess, our consumption habit becomes over-consumption. As we bring ever more items into our homes keeping the clutter at bay has, for many of us, become more than we can handle on our own.

An increasingly popular option for meeting this need is the emerging service industry of professional decluttering and organising. Engaging one such professional is likely to entail them visiting your home to assess your space, recommending strategies to tackle the clutter and supporting you in implementing them.

This study uses qualitative research methods to learn more about how professional organisers enter the industry, what their decluttering and organising work entails, and what insights they have gained about the lived experience of clutter through their uniquely close working relationships with their clients. The data collected through interviews and participant observation suggested that the clients who buy professional organising services can be categorised into four broad groupings according to shared characteristics. Professional organising businesses can package their preferred style of service delivery in a variety of ways and according to the dominant skill set of the individual professional organiser. This study concludes that the needs of those different client types may be most effectively met by the professional organisers with the corresponding dominant skill set. Equipped with this knowledge, professional organisers can structure their business, package their services and market themselves differently depending on which of those client groups is/are their ideal clients and therefore their target market.

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Introduction

More of us than ever before now enjoy access to a wider range of goods and choose to use our improved purchasing power to acquire them. Consumption has become a defining feature of our age. Irrespective of whether our materialistic tendencies are most accurately dubbed a habit or a hobby, and when exercised to excess, consumption becomes over-consumption.

As we bring ever more items into our homes we need ever more solutions for the sorting, storing and eventually discarding of them. Keeping our houses in order and the creep of clutter at bay has, for many, become more than they feel able to handle on their own. Our relationship with our possessions can be complex and confusing, closely intertwined with our identities and sense of self, and fraught with emotion. The result is a burgeoning demand for skillful and sensitive support to navigate the challenges of disentangling ourselves from our things to become more discerning consumers has come to light. An increasingly popular option for meeting this demand is the emerging service industry of professional decluttering and organising.

The purpose of this research is to contextualise material culture within a contemporary domestic setting. The 'stuff' that fills our homes is anthropologically interesting in that it speaks to the forming and reforming of identity through objects occupying a place in our intimate living spaces. When objects are understood as signifiers, ethnographic research techniques examining the experience of removing objects from the home provide an opportunity to observe their impact and significance.

This research will create opportunities for interviews and participant observation with people who offer their professional services to others who consider the objects in their homes to have become oppressively numerous and/or disordered, i.e. cluttered. Informants will be invited to elucidate on the emotions, practicalities and taboos around working with people who are living with clutter as well as the motivations for, and outcomes of, undertaking an exercise in decluttering.

Importantly, this project will stop short of delving into hoarding, hoarding disorder and matters relating to those with a clinical diagnosis relating to compulsive hoarding and saving behaviour. The reason for setting this boundary is that hoarding is a topic about which there is already much literature, particularly from within a clinical setting. Eliminating hoarding from this study leaves room for the concentration to remain specifically on clutter. The research findings from a clutter study could complement and contrast the existing body of research because the data has been gathered in a non-clinical context and it represents a step back from the extreme edges of the spectrum (if we imagine the spectrum to be from an extreme form of minimalism such as Natural Asceticism (Deezia, 2017) on one end of the spectrum and an extreme form of collecting and keeping such as hoarding on the other). This study examines instead the more mundane, workaday, and arguably more relatable problem of having a perceived clutter problem. Additionally, findings from this research will augment the existing literature concerned specifically with clutter. This appears currently to be a niche area of academic interest and what literature there is comes chiefly from North American scholars carrying out their research in the United States. It seems clear, then, that there remains room for studies from other countries and contexts to add to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

Initially, themes that I expected could emerge throughout the research included the relationship, if any, between clutter and wellbeing, between consumption and identity, and connections with aspirational lifestyles including minimalism, conscious consumerism, low-carbon living, zero waste and financial freedom. Ultimately, what emerged is an analysis of the business side of being a professional declutterer. Outcomes included a typology of different client groups, a characterisation of different professional organiser skill sets and preferences which meet the needs of those various client types, and an attempt at pairing different professional organising businesses with their most appropriately corresponding ideal client group/s.

Research Questions

With this research aiming chiefly to engage with contemporary material culture within the domestic sphere and the emergence of the professional decluttering and organising industry, my initial research questions were framed around what insights a professional organiser would be afforded given the special access they are granted to a client's home and possessions.

My initial objective for this research was to learn about the lived experience of clutter through the lens of the people that sell services and solutions to address it. I saw professional declutterers as a type of gatekeeper via whom opportunities for participant observation might be negotiated for example by shadowing them while they worked with a client. The research questions I devised aimed to draw out aspects of the people for whom clutter has become sufficiently problematic that they feel compelled to bring in professional help: How is domestic material culture used to express identity, values and beliefs? To what extent is there a link between clutter and concerns about mental and emotional wellbeing, sustainability (financial and environmental) and interpersonal relationships? Is the inability to keep your own house in order a cultural taboo? What role does the emerging profession of declutterers and organisers play?

Having cast the net wide at the start of the study, the focus gradually narrowed until it became clear that in order for the real value within my data to emerge I should be less concerned with whether a perceived clutter problem had detrimental effects on aspects of a person's life, home health or wellbeing. Other studies had already considered such matters (Roster et al, 2016: Saxbe and Repetti, 2010: Sorrel, 2020: Rogers and Hart, 2021). Instead, my focus shifted from the clients and their clutter to the professionals they bring in to help tackle it.

This shift in perspective led to a revised set of questions. Namely, what view, if any, do professional organisers hold on the choices people make when bringing material objects into their homes and whether those items express something about the owner's life or identity? Next, I sought to capture the professional organisers view on whether a perceived clutter problem was understood as a failure to keep one's house

in order. Lastly, I wished to investigate what role the professional organiser sees themselves playing in addressing the problem of clutter.

With these refined research questions, this study intends to move towards an understanding of how a person becomes a member of the professional decluttering and organising industry, what meaning and purpose they attach to their profession, and then, how they talk about themselves and their work.

Chapter One: Literature Review

The story of our relationship with our things is a long and complex one. The theoretical literature explores relationships between material culture and personhood and identity. This study is chiefly interested specifically in circumstances where material objects become viewed as oppressive or obstructive to the point of causing harm. Here there is less existing literature and an experience common to many clutter researchers, including me, is that sourcing primary and secondary sources for review is a challenge due to clutter being an as yet underrepresented topic in academic writing on material culture. What is not in short supply is literature about hoarding.

Centre of Excellence is, like APDO, a training provider offering a course in professional decluttering and organising. It differs greatly from APDO in that the training it offers is an online self-study course where the learner moves through the course content before then completing an exercise or responding to some questions to demonstrate their comprehension. The Centre of Excellence online training course makes a clear distinction between clutter problems and hoarding problems. It prioritises this distinction highly which is evident by the topic being addressed very early on in the course. Hoarding is tackled within the first module and is subsequently revisited in other modules multiple times.

Newell (2014) characterises a hoarder slightly differently, that is, as someone who has not distinguished between a home's storage space and its public space. By this

reckoning, the accumulation of items is distinct from the corralling or 'containment' (Attfield, 2000) of items in their proper place, i.e. in a place designated for storage.

Hoarding has been recognised as a mental health disorder in the UK since 2013.

People with Hoarding Disorder find comfort in things and the discarding of them to be distressing. People with a clutter problem find the things distressing and invite intervention and support in the form of professional organiser (Kilroy-Marac, 2016)

Domestic material culture in anthropology

In focusing this investigation on physical objects and the private spheres in which they are kept, this study draws heavily from the specialist interdisciplinary field of study concerned with 'material culture'. Understood to be "a material-based approach to the study of society and culture." (Reynolds and Stott, 1986, p2), material culture refers to the stuff - things, possessions, objects and items - that humans use, keep, trade, treasure and discard.

Appadurai (1986) offers a distinction between objects and commodities with commodities being things that have economic value, i.e. are worth something. Objects, by Appadurai's definition can also be said to have value even if that value is not necessarily monetary. He describes commodities as being socialised things in that their having economic value gives them a social value in terms of trade and exchange as well as possession and display and extends commodities to also include services as well as material items.

Douglas and Isherwood (1996) combined their economic and anthropological approaches and wrote about goods/consumption as a method of creating (or as an indicator of) inclusion/exclusion. Although they agree that goods have a communicative function, they build on this idea to show that goods have a communicative function in concert with other goods and space.

Thoreau (1854) describes the problem of excess in terms of his position that human's basic needs consist of food, shelter, clothing and fuel. He equates the need to keep comfortably warm with living. In order to demonstrate what he believes are the

detrimental impacts of materialism and over consumption he draws an analogy between acquiring excess items over and above our basic needs as becoming too warm, “unnaturally hot”, and even cooked!

Expressing ourselves through our stuff

Ferrero et al (2010) commented on the strong connection people make between possessions and their sense of self as being expressed through the grief someone can experience following the involuntary loss of one or more items. When we see things as being autobiographical, as telling the story of our lives or as a type of self-portrait, their loss is keenly felt. This is an example of consumption as a strategy of self-definition (Friedman, 1994).

Westacott (2016) advocates for frugality and simple living as a remedy to the harm caused by materialism, an example of which being the sense of grief described above when a much-loved item is removed or lost. Westacott says that rather than expressing ourselves through our stuff, we have the freedom to express our values and live in alignment with them by choosing to reject the very stuff which we’ve appropriated as signifiers of who we are and how we live.

When clutter becomes a problem

Some of the existing literature has wrestled with the task of defining, measuring or quantifying clutter. I will not repeat their efforts here. To answer my research questions, I’m less interested in pinning down a precise definition of clutter, for example through the use of a scale or a measure. A more useful endeavour would be to accept a subjective self-diagnosis of clutter as a problem. Professional organisers work with clients who are referred to them or who self-refer, because of a perceived clutter problem. Spending time ascertaining specifics about the extent to which each person is right to claim they are challenged by clutter or disorder is not informative to this study - that they think or feel their possessions have become a problem is enough.

To illustrate the difficulty of crafting a general definition of clutter, I offer this example. When asked, D, a professional organiser who has been in business for

upwards of eight years, suggested that clutter is ultimately the result of “things that are out of place”. Intuitively, this seems reasonable and relatable. It remains, however, as elastic as any other definition of clutter in that whether or not a thing is in or out of its proper place is entirely subjective. Such as in an article published on a literary blog extolling the virtues of stacking books into haphazard book towers dotted about one’s home as an excellent way to keep and organise a personal book collection, big or small. In this instance, it seems clear that while this would seem like disorder and disarray to some, to others those books are very much in their proper place (Harlan, 2015). We cannot, therefore, judge one person’s clutter by comparing it to another’s. The point at which the accumulation or disordering of things crosses the line is a wholly individual, permeable and moveable boundary.

Keeping up with the Joneses is akin to an arms race of sorts. When consumption becomes a competition to display wealth, status and power or to signal certain values or attitudes, a person’s possessions are put to work in more ways than one. In this way a car, for example, can function not only as a form of transport but also as an indicator of style, taste, wealth, status or privileged access especially to newly released or limited edition models.

Stuffocation (Wallman, 2015) argues that minimalist lifestyles will not replace capitalist/consumerist habits as it is insufficiently robust as a standalone concept, i.e. it only works in opposition to excess. Without the excess, there can be no rejection of it and therefore minimalism is a response rather than an alternative. Wallman argues instead for experientialism over materialism, although this is also problematic. It is, by his own admission, swapping one kind of keeping up with the Joneses for another.

One of the ways in which clutter has been shown to be linked to a detrimental side effect has been through studies that have examined its relationship to task avoidance, or procrastination in different groups - across generations (Ferrari and Roster, 2018) and non-white/urban populations (Prohaska et al, 2017)

With its increasing visibility as a topic for discussion in lifestyle media, a number of new publications have appeared which seemingly meet the needs of their readers in an impactful way. People keen to better understand themselves and their stuff are

reaching in their millions for books in this new sub-genre which sits a little awkwardly somewhere between personal philosophy, social commentary and self-help. Among the most famous of these are Marie Kondo (2014), a tidying expert from Japan also known as Konmari, and *The Minimalists* (Fields Milburn and Nicodemus, 2014, 2015 and 2016), two friends from the US who redefined the American Dream for themselves when they left their successful and well-paid corporate careers to pursue simpler, more meaningful lives. Both have become recognisable brands and have gone on to create hit shows on Netflix off the back of their best-selling books.

Responding to clutter

Arnold et al (2012) conducted the first large scale, comprehensive study of its kind - a systematic ethnoarchaeological observation of complex, unstaged home usage. This represented a departure from other commentaries on clutter which had, until that time, been largely anecdotal or self-reported. It aimed to fill the post-purchase knowledge gap about consumption, i.e. consumption trends and habits as viewed through purchasing behaviours fails to tell us anything about what happens next. We knew little about what families do with their stuff, where they keep it, how they store and use it, what goes unused or gets discarded and how they feel about it all. My research differs as it is UK-based and goes further as it brings the services of a professional declutterer into the mix.

There are only a small number of examples of literature that engages specifically with the industry that I have chosen as the subject of this research. The two that most closely relate to my research are those by Russell Belk, a marketing professor from Canada who conducted a study involving a US-based professional organiser and their clients, and Katie Kilroy-Marac, an anthropologist conducting fieldwork alongside professional organisers in Canada.

Kilroy-Marac's writings about decluttering and organising casts the professional organiser in the role of 'a new species of healer' whose interventions aid the client to move through the process of reorienting objects by moving them around (or out of) the space. In making these adjustments they are also manipulating the boundaries,

connections and associations that the object holds or represents (Kilroy-Marac, 2016).

The emergence of the professional declutterer

A growing sense of disquiet around the inherent paradox in consumption is evidence that the accumulation of material objects can be confusing and lead to anxiety, overwhelm or discomfort. That paradox stems from our attempts to temper our desire for ownership (whether that desire be intrinsic or extrinsic) and being encouraged to consume with the possibility that we may over consume to a detrimental extent. Professional organising has emerged as a creative response to that problem in the manner in which it can support people affected or afflicted by not having achieved the 'correct' balance.

Faced with the question of 'how to live well', whether that be in relation to one's own wellbeing, the environment or living within our means, recent years have seen an uptick in middle-income and lower-income earners increasingly seeking out professional help as an answer. What was historically the reserve of only the wealthiest members of society, is now within the reach of a broader spectrum of the population namely i) disposable income and ii) things to spend it on. Within the context of material culture - the consumption, accumulation and keeping of material items - more and more of us now possess more and more stuff. The management of that stuff has, for some, become a task so burdensome or disruptive to their ability to use and enjoy their homes that they seek outside help to calm the chaos. The result is a burgeoning service industry, that of the professional declutterer and organiser.

Professional organising can be said to still be in its infancy in the UK when compared to somewhere like the US. Although the industry as a whole in the UK is somewhat less established and less visible by comparison, it has in fact been quietly growing for some time. The Association of Professional Declutterers and Organisers (APDO), a members organisation for UK declutterers and organisers, was founded in 2004 and has been operating on behalf of professional organisers and their clients ever since.

I have conducted interviews with six such professional organisers all of whom are currently business owners and working in the UK as professional organisers. Of those six, two work with clients in or near London, two are based in the south and the remaining two operate in the north of England.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Ethical considerations

My responsibility as a researcher is to protect the physical, social and psychological well-being of those with whom I am conducting research. Although this research is not expected to involve high-risk situations or circumstances there exists, nevertheless, the possibility that sensitive discussion topics may result in emotional distress. To mitigate this, fieldwork conversations will be participant-led so that topics that have potential to provoke anxiety or cause upset can be approached sensitively or completely avoided.

Part way through my fieldwork which was conducted in Spring 2020, the UK was ordered into its first lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic (BBC, 2020). As well as forming an interesting new angle to fieldwork conversations it also presented new ethical considerations. Research should not be conducted in locations or circumstances that represent a high level of risk to personal safety or physical harm. As a result of the threat of COVID-19, and in line with government advice on social distancing, the decision was therefore taken not to carry out interviews face-to-face or to travel to meet with informants in person. All interviews would therefore be conducted remotely via phone or video call.

The promise of anonymity and confidentiality each professional organiser makes to their clients is the same commitment I have made to them. I, therefore, do not name anywhere in this research the business owners who have become my informants. This is to protect their privacy and that of their clients. Instead, I've assigned each person a random initial which I will employ in the coming pages when I refer to the

data collected during the interviews. The professional organisers are henceforth referred to as follows - D, H, M, N, P and S.

Research design

Quantitative research methods can be used to great effect in topics that intersect with clutter research or that skirt around its edges. The temptation within clutter discourse is to try to measure either the clutter itself (Institute for Challenging Disorganization, 2011) or its impacts (Saxbe and Repetti, 2010). There seems to be, however, an inherent difficulty in quantitative approaches to clutter, namely that of demarcating with any degree of precision the volume of accumulated items that must be reached in order that it constitutes clutter. Additionally, figures alone fall short when it comes to understanding the lived experience of the person with the perceived clutter problem. The distance from a human subject afforded by reducing their possessions to numbers and calculations risks leaving the researcher out in the cold with the rich detail of the subject's story left untold.

That this particular study would be approached using qualitative methods was clear from early in the project. To collect data sufficiently descriptive, rich and experiential so as to address the research questions, the research design was primarily crafted around two main ethnographic methods, namely those of participant observation and interviews. Both research tools, together with field notes, allow for the gradual emergence of a meandering path through the data by which the researcher may navigate around assumptions based on what they think they already know and towards insights and meanings gleaned from their informants' distinctive worldview (Eriksson, 2008).

Participant observation began online with an initial sweep of websites and social media channels owned and curated by businesses offering professional decluttering and/or organising as a service. These were viewed in the first instance from the perspective of a prospective client. With ideas for research questions still forming, this broad starting point aimed to provide insights into the people who visited these online resources, either out of curiosity or because they were motivated to engage

the services of a professional organiser, and their experience of material culture in the domestic settings of the home. The professional organisers were intended, then as gatekeepers - a way of gaining access to their clients. As per Agar's funnel approach (Agar, 1980) as the focus of the research narrowed it also shifted to the professional organisers themselves.

It was in this way that the research questions came to be framed around people who sell decluttering and organising services rather than those who buy them.

Professional declutterers and organisers as research informants would achieve an emic perspective of their own culture and practice as well as offering insight into the people that buy their services. The subjects of my research would therefore be the professional organisers themselves and, only by extension, their clients.

Identifying professional organisers who could become informants using a keyword search was possible thanks to their own online presence. This entailed using a search engine website to search for the most common keywords associated with professional decluttering and organising. Just as with small business owners in other industries, businesses selling decluttering and organising services use online platforms to promote their services and communicate with their client base. For any professional organisers that do not have an online presence or whose online presence does not include any of the most common keywords they would be excluded from the search results and therefore not considered for participation in this research.

Businesses with an online presence are typically careful to employ Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategies to ensure their content can be ranked as highly as possible by a search engine, primarily Google. An online search using keywords, i.e. the words or phrases that are commonly typed into a search engine, will return results that most closely match those search terms. These results, however, require further scrutiny and filtering to refine them into a usable sample size. For example, typing the keyword 'declutterer' into www.google.co.uk returned in excess of 76,800 results.

professional organiser	declutterer	house decluttering services
professional organiser uk	decluttering service	professional declutterer near me
professional declutterer	professional home organiser	home organisers near me

Table 1: Keyword search terms

Using these keywords in online searches returned results that could then be triaged according to a series of criteria. These criteria would narrow the pool to a selection of websites and online accounts belonging to professional organisers who could ultimately become informants.

The first search criteria for informants was that they were a UK-based business. A decision was taken early on to conduct an analysis of domestic material culture within a UK context. Professional organisers offering decluttering and organising services in other countries were therefore eliminated on this basis. This decision was taken not only for pragmatic reasons given that the researcher is UK-based, but because a UK-based study would also be an original addition to the existing body of knowledge within clutter research which has hitherto been overwhelmingly North American (Arnold et al, 2012; Belk et al, 2007). There is much scope for further studies to utilise multi-sited fieldwork to examine clutter and decluttering cross-culturally, comparatively and transnationally. This UK-based piece of research, in partnership with other existing clutter literature, could, therefore, be drawn upon by other researchers as a baseline for future studies.

In addition to being UK-based, informants in this research were required to be operating as a business and to have been trading for a minimum of six months. The purpose of this criterion was to differentiate professional organisers from hobbyists. Neither the company structure nor the type of business model was specified. Research participants could be any professional organiser charging for their decluttering and organising services. This did not preclude those with businesses that sold other services in addition to decluttering and organising. However, where other services were offered, it was necessary for decluttering and organising work to

constitute a significant proportion of their client work. A minimum threshold was set at fifty per cent.

Triaging the results of the keyword research using these criteria narrowed the pool to a sample size more appropriate to qualitative research methods. Notably, however, this pool of prospective research participants could be subdivided into two distinct categories - those who were members of APDO, and those who were not.

APDO is a community of professional organisers who are paid-up members of a UK-wide association. In order to become a member of APDO and to have their business listed on APDO's website, professional organisers must meet the following conditions; be fully insured, be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office for the purposes of data collection and processing, be registered with HMRC for tax purposes, and agree to be bound by the association's code of ethics.

There is no requirement to be a member of APDO nor are there any specific accreditation or credentials a person must obtain to practice as a professional declutterer and organiser. Professional organisers who chose not to be members of APDO are not operating illegally or illegitimately. They are, however, somewhat of an unknown entity when it comes to accountability and safeguarding. APDO members are required to sign up to the organisation's code of ethics and must also be fully insured. For a researcher wishing to do everything possible to mitigate and minimise any negative or unintended consequences of carrying out a study, it was felt that working with informants who willingly subscribed to these standards would present the least possible risk. The final criterion for inclusion in this study was, therefore, membership of APDO.

Negotiating access to the research community was achieved in large part via key participants with whom I connected on LinkedIn, a business networking website. Notably, the system of connections and networks upon which LinkedIn is based lends itself remarkably well to snowball sampling.

By scanning LinkedIn for 'first-level connections' (profiles of people who have a direct connection to my profile) and 'second-level connections' (people who are connected to my connections) it was possible to cultivate a growing network of professional

organisers. Having any number of connections in common with a professional organiser, regardless of whether or not we were known to one another, was a legitimate reason to send and accept connection requests. Those mutual connections were a sort of social endorsement of me as someone known and trusted and enabled my continued access in the form of a domino effect of passive e-introductions.

Having connected with a professional organiser I could now view and vet their profile against the target research criteria. For professional organisers who closely matched the research criteria, I sent a brief direct message introducing myself and my research. If that message was successful in eliciting a response along with permissions to contact them with more information, I then followed up by an email from my institutional email account which contained an information sheet (Appendix 1) and a consent form (Appendix 2).

Data collection and analysis methods

My research entailed one-to-one interviews with six different professional declutterers. In addition, I reinterviewed one person for further comments two months after our initial discussion. The conversations varied in length with the shortest one being 15-minutes long and the longest lasting 64 minutes. The interviews were conducted across a two month period between February and April 2020.

In addition to interviews, I also considered other data collection methods including surveys or questionnaires. I ultimately opted not to incorporate these research tools into my methodology due to their limited capacity for capturing richness and authenticity from respondents. What people say they do is often different from what they actually do, especially when answering questionnaires around taboo subjects or 'moralised' behaviours. Additionally, questionnaires risk being too leading or prescriptive to be useful (Okely, 1994). Questionnaires, surveys and other self-reporting research methods were therefore eliminated from my plans.

Additionally, I opted to champion qualitative research methods in this study as I believed it would produce the most informative and insightful results.

When considering my approach to interviewing, I judged either a structured or semi-structured interview as having the potential to be too leading. Favouring an unstructured approach to interviews felt appropriate as being more akin to a conversation allowing for the research to be participant-led and the possibility that themes would emerge that may surprise the researcher and enrich the data in ways that introduce new angles and new directions for further research.

Having committed to an unstructured approach to interviewing in order to allow the conversation to be informant-led, I acknowledge that this risks the resulting data being 'unstructured and unwieldy' and therefore challenging to analyse and use. Codifying the data, for example by transcribing and analysing the interviews using a software package such as NVivo, in order that it can be handled similarly to that collected via quantitative methods is posited as a possible remedy. Although not unreasonable, this approach is not always held up as a desirable way forward (Bryman and Burgess, 1994). To analyse qualitative data in this fashion risks disguising and diluting the richness it holds.

Alongside the interviews which were audio recorded, I kept handwritten notes. These notes and recordings together constituted my primary data and I referred to both throughout my analysis.

My approach to analysis was informed by thematic analysis (Thomas, 2017) incorporating grounded theory and constant comparison method. With the construction of theories inductively generated from the available data (Tie et al, 2019) hypotheses drawn out through a grounded theory approach remain 'grounded' in the evidence and less liable to fall foul of confirmation bias. In this way, any themes or patterns emerging from the data have done so by revealing themselves to the researcher and not by being stitched together by a researcher looking for evidence to support any preconceived or presumed outcomes.

Analysis of the data began early on in the process before the collection of primary data was complete. Using a constant comparison method meant that data collection

and analysis would occur concurrently (Birks and Mills, 2015). The process entailed gathering all the relevant notes and data following each new instance of data collection, i.e. interview, for the purpose of close reading and consideration alongside the existing bank of data. Doing so enabled me to notice and take note of important topics or recurring themes and the frequency and manner in which they came up.

Reflections

Ethnographers seeking to understand a culture on its own terms would typically be expected not to form theoretical frameworks or conceptions prior to collecting data in their chosen field site (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). This, however, is a skill experienced researchers hone over time.

Every researcher of culture is themselves in possession of a cultural background acquired from their upbringing then influenced, evolved and informed over time through their life experiences. For the ethnographer to possess such an acutely attuned level of self-awareness as to be able to recognise, let alone set aside, their own cultural biases is a tall order. Equally, ethnographic writing is a style not immune to human tendencies to be flawed or incomplete, neither of which are sufficient to discredit or discount it. That ethnography is as trope-filled and prone to blind spots as any other discursive writing is no cause for concern and does not negate or lessen its impact or value (Pratt, 1986).

Ethnography reveals much about the researcher as well as those they research and is, therefore, rooted in the subjective. This, however, is not a weakness of the method. While the outputs of ethnographic research are not objective scientific observation, they are nevertheless authoritative. This authority comes from being anchored in the subjective, sensory and sensuous telling of the subject's own lived experiences in their own words (Pratt, 1986). We are therefore learning not only about what we observe but also about what we can't observe.

As a novice researcher the combination of iterative abduction (Agar, 1980), snowball sampling and grounded theory as my methodological approach left me feeling adrift.

The realisation that I would be responsible for a study where I could not anticipate what would come up in the research, nor the eventual direction (or directions) it would take, was an uncomfortable one. Despite recognising the limitations of my own inherent preference for order, planning and structure I had expressly set out to carry out ethnographic research in an effort to set this study apart from other clutter research. Autoethnography and phenomenology, although not part of the original research design, ultimately became unignorable as an emerging methodology. My approach to preparing for interviews, the part I played in the conversation during the interviews, and the interpretations I made from the data in my analysis have all informed my research outputs and conclusions. I was everywhere in my research.

A researcher more experienced in the nuances of ethnographic methods may argue that whilst the unpredictability of a research project can be a source of great frustration it can also be its great strength because to adhere rigidly to a predetermined and prescribed project plan runs the risk of collecting stilted and sterile research outcomes (Levinson, 2010). Taking time to reflect and review after each interview and subsequently revisiting fieldnotes and recordings became an important reflexive exercise and added a new dimension to the methodology. It was a process that mirrored the act of decluttering. While carefully sorting through all the knowledge and observations I was accumulating, the most valuable pieces could reveal themselves as the ones I should keep.

Chapter Three: Ethnography, Analysis and Discussion

Ethnographic fieldwork, which in the case of this research took the form of interviews, produces data, insights and knowledge rooted in the authority and expertise of those closest to the topic. The resulting analysis is a type of discourse between the researcher and their informants rather than subjective reportage (Pratt, 1986). I'll therefore be using direct quotes from conversations with the professional organisers I interviewed as a way to represent them and their views using their own words. All direct quotes will be anonymised to honour my promise of confidentiality.

Themes

Professional organisers are typically highly values-driven and have been drawn to this type of work as a result. Core values that they have in common include wanting their work to have meaning and purpose. Their views of their clients are shaped by deeply held views around the centrality of home – that everyone deserves a home in which they feel safe and in which the space functions in ways that supports how that person wants to live.

All those I interviewed told their own unique story of how decluttering and organising became their profession. If asked as children what they wanted to be when they grew up none would have guessed their career paths would lead them here. Listening to them describe their different pathways into professional organising it struck me that despite the differences, what each was describing was essentially an evolution - drawing on their life experiences, their professional backgrounds, their local knowledge and networks and their own personalities each made their way into professional decluttering armed with the sum of their previous experiences and feeling driven to use that knowledge to improve the lives of people suffering with a problem they know they can help to tackle. D shared their thoughts on their pathway into professional decluttering by saying “now when I look back I think everything I’ve ever done has led me to becoming a professional organiser.”

A recurring theme that stood out in each conversation was the professional organisers’ willingness to accept that clients presenting with a perceived clutter problem were dealing with more than just their possessions. One of the values the data suggests professional organisers share is that they connect the experience of living in domestic disorder with the experience of feeling disorder in other ways namely emotionally and mentally. Equally, they are united in their belief that addressing domestic disorder by sorting and ordering material objects will not only bring a greater sense of calm and order to a clients home but also to their state of mind (Kilroy-Marac, 2016).

In making the decision to tackle the clutter, clients were also making the decision to process the meanings, memories and emotions those objects signified. A readiness to accept things as being far more than inanimate, benign and dormant is characteristic of the profession. A client's things are treated respectfully and frequently seen as part of a process of them constructing and signalling their identities or telling the stories of their lives. This often comes up for professional organisers when they are supporting a client to go through their possessions and consider whether it should be kept or discarded. P expressed in their interview with me that with many client sessions it is common that "as you're working through it they often come out with stories".

Interestingly, these professional organisers, many of whom have been in business for some years and worked with a large and varied clientbase, recount their recollections without blame or judgement. They do not view a client's perceived clutter problem as a failure. A client may feel or express that about themselves but the professional organisers I spoke with do not subscribe to that view. D told me that in their view, clutter develops as a problem for a client simply because "stuff has accumulated in a way they're not happy with". How much stuff each client has accumulated, and through what set of circumstances is not mentioned, instead P is indicating in this quote that what they notice about the client is that they are experiencing some form of suffering as a consequence. Professional organisers do not blame their clients for experiencing a problem with clutter. They do, however, as part of their efforts to help the client's situation improve, hold them accountable for facing it and moving through the process of dealing with it. N described to me their personal philosophy about their decluttering work as being "very much about walking forward". When a client is unable, unwilling or ill equipped to do that by themselves, the professional organiser can help to facilitate, support and encourage them in continuing to "walk forward" through their problem. H told me in our interview "I wish that I could reach more people because I know that I can help them."

Of the professional organisers I interviewed who have been in business the longest, they commented on a change they had noticed over the years that appeared to them to indicate an evolution in how others perceive and understand the industry. In their

early days as professional organisers they reported being asked by their clients not to reveal to friends, family or neighbours the true reason behind their visit or visits to that client's home. So acute was their feeling or shame at needing help to 'keep their house in order' that they were profoundly embarrassed by the idea of being 'found out'. Those same professional organisers also reported that in recent years they are asked to do this less and less. This, they surmise, is an indication of a sea-change in perception about clutter and the professional decluttering and organising industry. What in the past was felt by some to be a shameful and tightly held secret has become something that people are willing and able, and even sometimes proud, to tell their friends, families, colleagues and neighbours about including in the form of referrals. This is an interesting evolution in the business of decluttering. Before it had become more socially acceptable to hire a professional organiser, growing one's business through word of mouth advertising was not realistic as a marketing strategy. It simply did not happen. Today though this is no longer always the case. As N tells me "I'm finding more and more now that people do recommend me."

Despite these commonalities, I was also interested to note from the data the ways in which professional organisers differed from one another. For instance, they represent a wide variety of professional backgrounds prior to entering the industry. Some had a corporate background, others had a varied portfolio career and some had experience in caring, counselling or therapeutic roles.

A variety of personal experiences with clutter was also evident ranging from professional organisers who have always been neat by nature and instinctually inclined towards organising and decluttering through to people who have themselves dealt with a clutter problem, come out the other side and now want to support others who wish to achieve the same. This struck me as being reminiscent of services such as drug and alcohol counsellors and is what I expected to see more of. It seems, however, that this type of pathway into the industry is true for only some professional organisers and is probably in the minority.

Discussion

Interviews and observations of a range of members of the professional decluttering and organising industry reveal that no two professional organisers are the same. They bring a lot of themselves to their work including their personalities, their professional backgrounds and their worldview. In my conversation with N, they had formed the same view. About themselves and other professional organisers, N said “we all work in quite different ways and have quite different clients.” That those who choose to set up in business and make their living by selling professional organising services draw heavily on aspects of their personal and professional selves in order to operate successfully means that, unsurprisingly, each business is as different as the person running it. Additionally, for decluttering and organising businesses that sell the same or similar services as their competitors the business owners themselves are their own unique selling point.

The skill sets required for entering the decluttering and organising profession can be divided into three broad categories: project (or task) management, people management and business management.

Skills and competencies denoted by the label ‘project management’ are those that the professional organiser will draw upon in order to enact the practical and logistical elements of their services. Skills in project planning and coordination will aid their ability to develop a strategy to take on their client’s clutter problem. Pragmatism, problem-solving, adaptability and a good working knowledge of different options for sorting, storing and maintenance of physical items will all come into play.

Additionally having a network of specialist contacts who can be called upon for advice or service delivery will also serve the professional organiser well. For example, a network of trusted trades people who can be brought in for repairs and maintenance could prove invaluable to a client for whom that unfinished DIY task has been on their to do list to tackle ‘one day’ but has remained untouched for some time. Helping clients over barriers related to the disposal of decluttered items is another piece of practical know-how that can help a client no longer put off the decision to let go of something. Not knowing who to call at the local council to

arrange a waste collection, for example, could be the last hurdle a professional organiser can help their client over to finally get rid of their broken old fridge.

People management skills are those interpersonal and relationship building skills that professional organisers use to great effect in order to establish trust and rapport with their clients. The professional organisers I spoke with were united in the view that the relationship between themselves and their client was central to the success of any clutter intervention. The organiser that I'm calling S felt strongly that being open and authentic with their clients was essential in achieving the necessary level of trust to be able to help them attain the improvements they sought to their particular clutter problem - "our business is based on our relationship with the individual... they know we're genuinely interested in them first and their home second."

Professional organisers like N have observed many times over how the process of decluttering and organising is "an emotional journey as well as physical". Some clients are able to articulate their discomfort with their perceived clutter problem and describe their emotions to professional organisers in terms of feeling "shame", "overwhelm" and "embarrassment". Other clients give clues to their emotional state during decluttering sessions through their behaviour and body language. N described some of the ways clients communicate those emotions physically. They might have their head in their hands or will turn away from you. Some also display avoidance behaviours whereby they walk away from the decluttering exercise mid-session to take themselves off to a different room or space in the house that feels less confronting. D talked about physical indicators they had observed when a client's decluttering session had come to an end where the client felt satisfied with their efforts and/or the results. D described seeing peoples visible "relief and release - I feel it myself and I see it in my clients".

Professional organisers typically have well developed people management skills and are able to deliver their services empathetically, patiently and without judgement. They can gently keep clients on track with a decluttering exercise by remaining supportive and understanding in the moments when the client is experiencing discomfort or disillusionment with the process.

The need for some degree of expertise in business management comes up for many professional organisers only at the point at which they have made the decision to set up their business. Only one of the six people I had interviewed had prior experience as a business owner before launching their own decluttering and organising business.

Business management skills are necessary for professional organisers due to the structure of the industry. It is not common for professional organisers to be employed by a company. Instead, many are self-employed small business owners and are responsible for decision-making in every aspect of their business including their finances, marketing, strategy and service delivery.

Four out of the six professional organisers I interviewed were registered as sole traders and two were limited companies. Only three of them worked with other professional organisers in some capacity, either by linking up with other professional organising companies to partner with them on service delivery or by outsourcing a portion of their client work to another professional organiser on a contract (or freelance) basis.

Professional organisers who opt to become members of APDO can access the support and training the organisation offers. APDO members who feel they lack skills and experience in any of these skill sets can seek further professional development through this route as well as access the peer support offered by the network. To summarise, however, a person looking to begin a career as a professional organiser can expect that they will have opportunities to use and develop their skills in all three of the areas indicated in figure 1. D said of their professional organising career “this is the first job I’ve had that uses all of my character strengths.”



Figure 1: Diagram showing overlapping skill sets characteristic of professional organisers.

To be adept in all three skill sets has emerged as a defining characteristic within this industry. An example of a comparable profession requiring similar dexterity and adaptability does not spring easily to mind. Evidently, those running businesses in the decluttering and organising industry are sophisticated professionals with an unusual combination of skills and competencies. That said, my data did not reveal any evidence of these three skill sets being held to the same level of proficiency by every professional organiser. Each appears to be particularly strong in the skill sets in which they are especially experienced or that align best with their own preferences. This, I will label their dominant skill set. Furthermore, whilst they do not favour their non-dominant skill sets, i.e. those in which they hold the least prior experience, they nevertheless undertake to deliver the associated responsibilities. These three areas of expertise can be likened to a three-legged stool - if one leg were missing the stool would topple. Professional organising businesses must maintain all three legs of the stool in order to operate, albeit not necessarily to the same degree. Dominant and non-dominant skill sets can sit happily alongside one another and there is sufficient

range of tolerance within the professional decluttering industry for that uneven distribution of expertise, or a 'wonky stool' business model.

Given that professional organisers and their businesses share this trait in common, they nevertheless vary a great deal in other ways. All of the professional organisers I talked with shared with me some of their career history as they reflected on how they had come to their current line of work. All the six informants I interviewed considered their previous jobs to be a contributing factor to their journey into professional decluttering. As the conversations progressed and each person revealed more about the different ways they live to work and the kinds of clients they typically work with, a pattern became apparent whereby a professional organiser's previous career was, at least in part, an indicator of which of three skill sets outlined above was likely to be their dominant, or preferred, one.

In discussion with professional organisers about the type of services they offer and that clients request of them some patterns began to emerge. These patterns became evident in several ways which ultimately lent themselves to groupings. The result is a categorisation of client-types into four different groupings.

Client Type 1

This client group will tend to seek out professional organising help offered as a project-based service. Their perceived clutter problem is typically a source of frustration, anxiety or embarrassment for them, much like Sasaki's (2017) idea of a silent to-do list whereby our things become signifiers of tasks not yet finished, projects not yet started and potential left unrealised which in turn causes us a nagging feeling of disquiet.

Although an accumulation of things may have become a logistical problem for the client, i.e. they may repurchase things they already own knowing that item to already be somewhere in their overstuffed cupboards but being unable to put their hands on it, it has not become so extreme as to have seriously impeded their ability to use their home. Instead, they have been able to recognise that a degree of disorder is causing them some anguish or discomfort and have taken the decision to tackle it.

This client may be time poor but has the means to meet the cost of hiring outside help. They, or someone in the household, may already have experience of bringing professionals into the home for the purpose of maintaining, cleaning or repairing things in and around the house. This client is results-driven and adapts a 'task and finish' approach to the area or areas of their home they wish to remedy. The role of the professional organiser for this client is as a cheerleader and motivator. Their value is in their ability to spur the client on to begin a decluttering and organising project and keep them on track to see it through. Once a task is deemed complete, the client will be unlikely to seek further assistance from a professional organiser until or unless such time that they experience clutter similarly again in the future.

Clients in this grouping are motivated by results and look forward to a satisfying 'before and after' photo. Side by side images showing the outcome of the decluttering and organising exercise are appealing as a measure of success.

Professional organisers who prefer this style of client work may find that a well maintained online presence displaying a variety of before and after photos from former clients works well as a strategy for marketing to new customers.

Client Type 2

This client type groups together those people who prefer a type of support that enables them to develop better habits around dealing with clutter. Their working relationship with the professional organiser will typically be a longer lasting one by comparison with Client Type 1. This client possibly also appreciates an appealing 'before and after' transformation but may also recognise in themselves that the improvement they are seeing is likely to occur incrementally and over time. They hope to implement lasting change rather than a quick fix.

Professional organisers who are able to be sympathetic and patient with the sensitivities behind a person's attachment to material objects are well placed to work with this type of client. A measure of success for this client would be not only a less cluttered and disordered space, but the skills to maintain it. In this case, the professional organiser is cast in a role akin to a teacher, coach or accountability partner.

These clients are likely to experience the effects of their perceived clutter problem in a more profound way than others. Someone in the Client Type 1 group is more likely to see the completed decluttering task as the finish line. Conversely, someone in this client group may be experiencing a clutter problem as a symptom or consequence of some other problem or problems. By undertaking to tackle the possessions they are, by extension, perhaps also setting in motion the first steps towards addressing other issues. In my conversation with M they told me it's not uncommon to find that "you might start at one point and move in a totally different direction" with a single client. Another professional organiser, N, seemed to concur when they told me that they had, on more than one occasion, worked with clients who had initially wanted help with decluttering their home and eventually ended up "decluttering a few husbands!". In this example, N is observing an evolution in their clients' thinking about what they feel deserves to take up space, not only in their homes but also in their lives. For this type of client asserting control over their material possessions can empower them to continue flexing their decision-making muscles and make ever more substantial changes, like a sort of warm up. For these clients, then, decluttering is part of a broader lifestyle transformation and their journey is thereby never really 'finished'. It is in this way that it can be argued that a professional organising serving these kinds of clients can be likened to a coach.

It is likely that upon completion of a decluttering exercise, follow up visits will reoccur for a period of time afterwards. This is because the client is seeking support, not only with the task at hand, but with cultivating the habit of practising (semi)regular maintenance so that the problem does not escalate. They will likely become a repeat customer due to their need for 'check-in's' or 'top ups' in order that their clutter problem does not quickly re-emerge soon after the professional organiser departs. Follow up visits may be variously timed - perhaps weekly, monthly or less frequently - but function consistently as reinforcement, encouragement and motivation. 'Little and often' is how this client best responds to the challenge of unlearning old patterns of thinking and behaviour and adopting new ones.

Client Type 3

It is in this group of clients that we would find people who suffer with chronic disorganisation to the extent that they may struggle with aspects of taking care of themselves and their homes. One professional organiser that I spoke with has worked with a number of clients that I would categorise within this grouping. H told me that “for some people it can be really debilitating”, and even “completely paralysing”.

This client experiences clutter in a way that impedes their home’s ability to function. They may, for example, have a room or rooms in their home that have become overtaken by objects to the point of being almost unusable. The reasons for their excessive accumulation of things will be varied but it is more likely than not that this client will be experiencing their clutter problem alongside some other significant needs or limitations. It’s possible that they will be suffering (or recovering) from issues related to their physical, mental or emotional health that make it hard for them to maintain, manage and discard their things. These needs may have been identified by someone other than the client. This group is therefore the most likely to have been referred to a professional organiser whereas Client Type 1 and Client Type 2 are more likely to self-refer. The sorts of agencies and support networks that might consider referring a person to a professional organiser include social services. General Practitioners, health visitors and charities as well as the client’s relatives. A professional organiser with a background in therapy, social work or is experienced in supporting people with complex needs are most likely to be well prepared to meet the needs of clients in this grouping. They may find that good links with local authorities and service providers serves as an effective way to gain referrals for new clients.

An appropriate measure of success for Client Type 3 is quite different from the two previous client types. A before and after photoshoot, for example, may fail to demonstrate the impact of the professional organisers support. With this client, a professional organiser may find that their visits entail a gentle lead in and some light decluttering rather than getting stuck in with gusto as we might from a visit to Client Type 1. A successful visit could be one where the professional organiser and the client spent much of the session sitting together and talking, ostensibly having a

friendly catch up over a cup of tea but also building the trust needed for the client to feel able to embark on even a simple decluttering exercise. A professional organiser can support their client with small wins, such as clearing enough space in a bedroom so that the client is able to use their bed. For Client Types 1 and 2, this might seem to them to be negligible progress. For Client Type 3 it could represent a significant forward step. During an interview with a professional organiser who receives a proportion of their client work via referrals from the local authority, S suggested that “there’s a big gap for people who need a little bit of care... so they can stay living well in their homes” and that professional organisers can be amongst the people and services able to help meet that need.

Client Type 4

This fourth and final client grouping consists of people with chronic hoarding and saving behaviours. These clients may or may not have a formal diagnosis of Hoarding Disorder but are likely to experience clutter as a problem in its most extreme form.

Whilst this is a type of client with whom a sizable proportion of professional organisers have worked, it remains, in my view, a specialist area of expertise within the industry. Given that it is generally and widely accepted that there is a separation between clutter and hoarding, here is where I have drawn the line in the sand.

Clients of this type and the professional organisers who work with them are therefore out of scope for this research.

Type	Predominant Characteristics of Client / PO relationship	PO's (Perceived) Role	Common Success Measure
1	- Project-based - Task and finish - Results orientated - Time-limited	PO as cheerleader / project manager	Before vs after transformation
2	- Ongoing support / check-ins / encouragements - Little and often (accountability) - Regular and consistent (maintenance)	PO as coach	Incremental change / habit forming
3	- Client's ability to use and enjoy the home severely hampered - Combination of complex issues - Decision to initiate intervention made externally	PO as pseudo-counselor	Prevention from worsening
4	Hoarding	-	-

Table 2: Professional organising skill sets and corresponding Client Types.

Table 2 lists the four different Client Types alongside their key characteristics. The lines between the categories are not intended as an impenetrable demarcation making the categories completely distinct from one another. Instead, the dotted line denotes an allowance for a degree of ebb and flow between the categories. This also extends to the thinking around the different professional organising skill sets and how they align with these client types. For example, a professional organiser with a dominant skill set in project management may find they have a preference for working with Client Type 1. Equally, a professional organiser with a dominant skillset in people management might be drawn more to work with clients who have characteristics more in line with Client Type 2 and Client Type 3 than with Client Type 1. This does not mean, however, that the same professional organiser cannot also work with clients from other types, and do so extremely competently. That is, having a preferred or ideal client type does not preclude a professional organising business from taking on clients with characteristics more similar to other client types.

Conclusion

Conducting research on the topic of professional decluttering and organising has brought into focus its profound importance and impact for the people who sell professional organising services as well as those who buy from them. I have learned from conversations with six such professionals that the people drawn to this type of work have in common that they are values-driven and possess a sophisticated combination of complex skill sets. Not all professional organisers are equally as skilled in all of the three skill sets my research identified (project management, people management and business management). Instead, it is more likely that professional organisers will tend to have a dominant or preferred skill set. It is probable that this dominant skill set is influenced by the individual organisers' lived experience including their past or current relationship to their own material possessions, their personally held worldview and their career prior to setting up in business in the decluttering and organising industry. Additionally, the dominant skill set could serve as a fairly reliable indicator of each professional organiser's working style.

Further to these insights about the professional organisers themselves, the data suggests that their clients can also be grouped into categories based on common characteristics. A professional organiser's dominant skill set will probably correspond with the needs and preferences of one (or some) of those client types thus indicating a professional organiser's *ideal* or *preferred* client type. Knowing their dominant skillset and the client type or types with which it best aligns, can be a useful tool for business planning helping professional organisers understand their target market and then package and promote their services accordingly.

These conclusions could have practical applications for professional declutterers and those who support and train them, such as APDO. Further research could also be illuminating and serve to reinforce, problematise or negate the conclusions of this study. A logical next step could be to undertake participant observation on site, perhaps in the form of shadowing professional organisers as they carry out their work. The value of doing so would be in getting closer to the field site, i.e. where

these practices are enacted, without disturbing or disrupting the meaning-making being undertaken in those encounters.

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Appendix One

Appendix 1: Research Information Sheet



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

UNIVERSITY OF WALES

Trinity Saint David

Participant Identification Number:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: (Provisional) Contemporary Material Culture in the Domestic Sphere and the Emergence of the Professional Decluttering and Organising Industry

Dear Participant:

My name is Jennifer Gibbard and I am a MA Engaged Anthropology student in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Wales Trinity St David.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. This project will entail a series of interviews with people working in the UK as professional declutterers and/or organisers and aims to shed light on the emergence of this profession within the context of domestic 'clutter'.

I intend for the interviews to be very conversational, informal and unstructured. I hope to hear about things like your pathway into and motivations for working in professional decluttering and/or organising, as well as your impressions of people's experiences of living with clutter and the future of the decluttering/organising industry.

All notes, recordings and transcripts will be kept strictly confidential to the researchers involved and will at **NO** time be released to the general public. This gives you a chance to express your views confidentially and anonymously. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary so you can withdraw at any stage.

Our conversation should take about 30 minutes to complete, but there is no time constraint. There are also no right or wrong answers. Attached is a consent form which I will ask you to sign before we begin in order to confirm your consent to participate.

After careful analysis of the data obtained from this conversation, I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the findings at your request. The results of this research will hopefully enhance my understanding of the past, present and future of professional decluttering and organising and serve as evidence for inclusion in my MA dissertation.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation. If any questions arise, please contact me at:

Jennifer Gibbard

c/o Faculty of Humanities, University of Wales Trinity St David

Email: 1703586@student.ustsd.ac.uk

Appendix Two

Appendix 2: Research Consent Form



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Participant Identification Number:

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: (Provisional) Contemporary Material Culture in the Domestic Sphere and the Emergence of the Professional Decluttering and Organising Industry

Name of Researcher: **Jennifer Gibbard**

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the research team. ☐
4. I understand that my name will **not** appear in any reports, articles or presentations unless I specifically request otherwise. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

You may decline to participate in this study. You may end your participation in this study at any time. If you decide to remain anonymous, maintaining your anonymity will be a priority and every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. If you prefer anonymity, there will not be any identifying information on audiotapes or transcripts of this or any interview. No-one will hear any audiotapes or see any transcripts without your prior consent. All materials generated from this or any interview will remain confidential.

When completed, please return in the envelope provided (if applicable) or scan and email to Jennifer Gibbard at 1703586@student.uwtsd.ac.uk