



Collecting in a Consumer Culture

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ABSTRACT - In contemporary America, collecting has become a pervasive phenomenon that reflects many aspects of consumer culture. In this chapter, we define collecting, review its history, and present a grounded theory of its meanings, modes, and practices before concluding with an assessment of its social desirability. Throughout, we draw on the relevant literature and informants both during and after the Consumer Behavior Odyssey. Thus, we move between empirical and conceptual, as was true in the development of this research project over its five year history to date.

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COLLECTING IN A CONSUMER CULTURE

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In contemporary America, collecting has become a pervasive phenomenon that reflects many aspects of the modern life. In this chapter, we define collecting, review its history, and present a grounded theory of its meanings, motivations, and social desirability. Throughout, we draw on the relevant literature and interviews with informants both during and after the Consumer Behavior Odyssey. Thus, we move between empirical and conceptual, as was true in the development of this research project over its five year history to date.

INTRODUCTION

Asked what things they would save in a fire, people we have interviewed commonly cite a number of "special" objects such as keepsakes, heirlooms, and valuables. It is no coincidence that many of these objects constitute collections that have been systematically gathered and preserved. For, unlike ordinary objects of consumption, collections tend to take on a significance comparable in some respects to that of family members. Collected objects are often anthropomorphized, fetishized, and they define and occupy the little world of an intimate family in which the collector reigns as an absolute sovereign.

Consider the case of Sigmund Freud - certainly not a typical human being, but a reasonably representative collector. Although our knowledge of his collecting behavior is secondary -- based on written accounts and interviews at the Freud Museums on Hampstead Heath in London and at 19 Berggasse in Vienna -- we offer the following synthesis. Starting two months after the death of his father in 1896, the then 40-year-old Freud began to amass a collection of Egyptian, Assyrian, and Chinese antiquities that eventually numbered approximately 2300 pieces. These objects crowded his study into two rooms where he wrote and consulted with patients. When Edmund Engelman took secret photographs of the study before he fled to England to escape the Nazi occupation of Vienna in 1938, he described the decor in this way:

antiquities filled every available spot in the room. I was overwhelmed by the masses of figurines and statuettes that overflowed every surface. To the left of the door was a large bookcase covered with tall ancient sculptures. In the corner, at the end of the wall facing these statuettes, was Freud's chair, almost hidden by the cushions of a couch.... To the left and right of the door were glass showcases filled with hundreds of antiquities set up in several rows; every bit of cabinet space was filled.... I was amazed by the unbelievable number of objects (Engelman 1976, pp. 137-138).

Similarly, Jobst (1978) suggests that Freud's office took on a museum-like appearance, and Peter Gay notes that:

The first and overpowering impression that Freud's habitat makes on the visitor is the profusion of objects. The sculptures, finally, have their assigned shelves and their glass cases, but they intrusively invade the space intended for other purposes: bookshelves, tops of cabinets, writing tables, even Freud's much used desk. The whole is an embarrassment of objects (1976, p. 17).

The hundreds of statuettes in this collection are of animal and human figures that Freud arranged facing him at "close-packed ranks like soldiers on parade" (Gay 1976, p. 17). Friends and family noted that the fortunate transfer of his collection to wartime Vienna made his adjustment to England far easier, as he was surrounded by familiar loved objects. In a letter to his biographer, Stefan Zweig, Freud claimed that "despite my much vaunted frugality I have sacrificed a great deal of Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiquities, have actually read more archaeology than psychology" (quoted in Freud 1978, p. 234). Although he is far better known for his writings, clearly these objects played a major role in his life. Freud scouted for antiquities during his travels and developed relationships with dealers who brought him objects they had found. In *My Psychology of Everyday Life*, Freud described how, due to his preoccupation with collecting, he would see similar shop signs in foreign cities as proclaiming "antiquities" "this displays the questing spirit of the collector," (Freud 1978, pp. 119-120). Freud's student and colleague Ernest Jones (1955) describes how, after making a new acquisition, Freud would bring it to the dining room table so that he could admire it during the meal. After placing the pieces in his study or consulting with a friend, he would rearrange them. According to a long-time maid, before beginning work each day Sigmund Freud would bid "good morning" to a Chinese figure on his desk (Spector 1975). He was also in the habit of holding, examining, and fondling the statues (Spector 1975, p. 21; Sachs 1945, p. 101). As Gay (1989) concludes:

Collecting stamps, or china--or Greek and Egyptian and Chinese statuettes, for that matter--part preserves, early erotic pleasures; Freud, we are told, liked to gaze at the antiquities on his desk as and, at times, moving from looking to touching, would stroke his favorites. But there is more passion collecting, as anyone who has ever collected can testify, gives power. To possess a complete collection of certain stamps or of one's reviews or letters to the editor is, in some intimate fashion, a way of commanding the world (p. 18).

Considering his extreme devotion to the clutter of little ancient icons with which he surrounded himself, Freud's subjects of collecting in general and his own collecting in particular. However, he did offer one brief interpretation

The core of paranoia is the detachment of the libido from objects. A reverse course is taken by the collector who directs his surplus libido onto an inanimate object: a love of things (Freud 1908, quoted in Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 18).

We shall return to this interpretation and to Freud's own collecting later in this paper. For the present, it is sufficient to note that collecting activity and his comments on collecting both support the observation that a key feature of collecting is the elevation of possessions in the collection to an extraordinary status not bestowed upon the vast majority of objects in the collection.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

Collection of primary data materials for this project began during the summer spent traveling on the Odyssey. Much of the literature on collection, some of which reports empirical findings, began prior to the Odyssey and guided the question. Many of our data on collecting were gathered subsequent to the summer of travel. The data are primarily from interviews with people who are currently collectors. Some of these data are based on participant observation of action in context. The data describe in detail collectors' perspectives on their action and are less rich with regard to perspectives in action (Glaser and Lidz 1974). Because of their pride in the collection, we encountered little resistance on the part of collectors. It was difficult was shifting their focus from the objects themselves to the process of collecting. Most collectors in the sample were once, although a few were studied in sufficient depth over time to permit the construction of case study materials.

Most people included in the sample fall into the category of avid collectors, since a substantial portion of the sample is drawn through collector shows. Other members of the sample were identified through self-designation. Many interviews were conducted at collectors' homes, while others were conducted in the midst of collectors' shows. Purposive sampling was used to draw from various demographic groups to the sample, however, this was not a technique employed throughout the project. In part the grounded theory suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and in part an attempt at the thick description suggested by Denzin (1989). In total, over 190 collectors are included in the sample representing differing geographical locations. They also represent a broad spectrum of objects collected in terms of breadth of appeal, price, and availability. The project was anything rather than limiting the sample to collectors of particular objects (as is prevalent in studies of collectors) but rather objects themselves (often the focus for the collector) to the process and meaning of collecting as a consumption activity. The data and the literature to construct and frame a definition of collecting.

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Collecting

Collecting is a specialized form of consumer behavior (i.e., acquiring, using, and disposing of products). Collecting is distinguished because its primary focus is on gathering more of something (Brown 1988). In the most common contemporary form, objects collected are acquired through marketplace purchase; used - through maintenance, display, and related activities; and disposed of only at death. Rather than viewing shopping as a necessary or even odious task to be minimized or avoided, it is a constant and continual shopping trip in pursuit of objects for the collection. As Herrmann (1972, p. 22) notes, "The collector is stilled once and for all any inhibition against spending money on the-objects of his choice." Like Freud, the collector is a hidden treasure in the marketplace.

Lehrer (1990, p. 58) offers this view of the collector's quest:

Envy us [collectors] because all our car trips down country lanes and "blue" highways are treasure troves. Envy us because every mail delivery has the potential for having the note about or Polaroid shot of a find. We have been looking for desperately Envy the adventures we have while on The Hunt But most of all, we envy you for the Thrill of The Find.

Collectors are engaged in a competition that, for some, becomes an heroic mission in an indifferent or scornful consumer activities that match the passion of collecting as a mode of consumer behavior. And collecting is perhaps a consumption activity that is also a form of production. At its best, collecting creates and produces a unique, valuable contribution to the world. For example, had not the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Homer been collected and preserved, the world would be the poorer for their lack.

We take collecting to be the selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession, and disposition of an interest in objects (material things, ideas, beings, or experiences) that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from. The set of objects that this set is perceived to constitute. This definition coheres with that of Belk (1982) and Belk, Wallendorf, Sherin, and Asch (1988). It is also generally consistent with prior definitions such as the following:

collection..[is] "an obsession organized." One of the distinctions between possessing and collecting is that the latter implies order, system, perhaps completion. The pure collector's interest is not bounded by the monetary worth of the objects of his desire; whatever they cost, he must have them (Aristides 1988, p. 330).

To collect is to gather objects belonging to a particular category the collector happens to fancy.... The collection is what has been gathered (Alsop 1982, p. 70).

A collection is basically determined by the nature of the *value* assigned to the objects, or ideas possessed. If the *predominant* value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic, i.e., if it is valued for its own use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it, whatever circumstance of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. If the predominant value is extrinsic, representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen, etc., then it is the subject of a collection (Durost 1932, p. 10).

To qualify as a collection, the items collected must have some similarity and interrelationship. By the act of collecting, the collection each piece is transformed from its original function of toy, icon, bowl, picture, whatever, to an object with new meaning -- a member of an assemblage that is greater than the sum of its parts (Belk 1993-1994).

Each of these definitions shares with ours the specification that the collector views the collection as an entity due to the unity of its components. The basis for this unity is identified by labeling the set as "a collection of ___" and is further defined by the fact that the collector consciously or unconsciously heeds in adding to the collection.

While a collection remains a collection when additions stop, a collector ceases to be a collector under these conditions. A collection "dead" (Freud, Freud, and Grubrich-Simitis 1976, pp. 313). Although the original collector may continue to care for the dead collection, such curating activity is then separated from collecting activity. As the most recent collecting activity ends, the passive possessor becomes less and less of a collector. In specifying that the collector is an active agent, we also eliminate the passive recipient of previously collected objects provided by others without personal choice.

Similarly, to acquire a number of potentially related objects without keeping them (in tangible or symbolic form) is not collecting. The ingredient missing in this case is the possessive construction of a set. For instance, we have interviewed many people who do not perceive their travel destinations as a set, as well as other travelers who consciously collect an expanding set of travel experiences within a specified domain (e.g., continents visited). As with travel experiences, a number of car collectors interviewed do not have all of their collection physically at hand. Rather, because of the expense of acquisition and the nature of *serial* collections involving ownership of only one or a few automobiles at one time. Nevertheless, because they

acquisitions as part of set, they qualify as collectors. Ownership (or at least a proprietary feeling) also appears to number of our informants express sentiments similar to those of a stamp-collector interviewed by Danet and K

It's mine (the collection). I can do with it what I want. I can arrange it in the album the way I want it in exhibits (p. 263).

Since ownership or possession is required for collecting, a museum curator who uses other people's money to run a museum is not a collector unless he or she has strong proprietary feelings for the objects acquired. However, they are regarded as an institutional collector if the other requirements for collecting are fulfilled. While groups, families, or whole cultures may engage in collecting behavior, it is not uncommon that it is individuals within these institutions whose proprietary feelings required to be considered individual collectors. Thus, a couple or family may refer to "our collection" but usually "mine."

Another similarity between our definition of collecting and many of those just quoted is that they jointly note that when an object enters a collection it becomes non-ordinary, non-utilitarian (at least in the case of formerly utilitarian objects) "special." In a term we will develop more thoroughly later in this chapter, the collected item becomes *sacred* (Bourdieu 1989). While fine art items and some other aesthetic objects (such as books and recordings) may enter a collection with their extraordinary sacred character, other items are sacralized when they first enter a collection. This normally involves their former functions as, for instance, advertisements, stones on a beach, stamps for paying postage charges, or objects of activity. Even those collected objects that retain their original uses (e.g., antique furniture, cars, jewelry, hats, records) more than functional products, are treated with extreme care, and are often only employed ritually or on special occasions. For example, someone who owns a rare recording might tape it for everyday listening and store the original for safekeeping. In a case where the objects are instead used routinely or casually without regard for their special significance, we do not consider them part of a collection.

Our definition is more expansive than the others mentioned above in going beyond material objects to include events and people as collectibles. We believe that the theoretical model developed in this paper applies equally well to collections of intangibles as well as both inanimate and animate objects. (Here, the latter refers to plants and animals, occasionally people -- as in the dwarfs who were once a part of royal collections, the wives of Henry VIII, or the husband of a woman who comments on the opprobrium now attached to "collecting" people, see Danet and Katriel 1989).

Our view involves several further differences from some of the prior definitions. We do not insist that collecting involves a formal classification, as do Phillips (1962) and Humphrey (1983), for instance. Rather, as will become evident, we believe that classification defines one of two major types of collecting; one which epitomizes a common model of science, based on a systematic pattern, and another type of collecting involving connoisseurship. There must be some systematic pattern displayed (even if it is not formal) in adding items to any collection, but deciding selectively whether an item belongs in the collection (or how to display it) is a classificatory act any more than deciding whether to add an article of clothing to one's wardrobe (or deciding how to display it) is an act of classification.

We also do not view collecting as a necessarily obsessive act, as does Aristides (1988). While it may become obsessive and addictive, this need not happen. Furthermore, as argued in a later evaluative section, these undesirable labels are not necessarily clinical in nature. Love, for example, can sometimes be seen as involving an obsessive behavioral pattern as well as being characterized less favorably than love, we did not prejudge it to be either a positive or negative phenomenon.

In summary then, we define collecting as a form of acquisition and possession that is selective, active, and longiternally oriented. It is that the objects, ideas, beings, or experiences derive larger meaning by their assemblage into a set. We turn now to a discussion of collecting and other phenomena.

Accumulating, Hoarding, and Investing

Collecting must also be distinguished from several other phenomena with which it is sometimes confused. The accumulation of possessions, ideas, or experiences is excluded from our definition of collecting, first, because it lacks selectivity (and secondly, because of the lack of systematic selectivity in acquiring them, items in an accumulation also lack unity and defy categorization).

that the accumulation is merely a passive refusal to dispose of items that may have entered our possession, an agency needed for collecting. Unlike collected items that may bring pleasure and pride in possession -- and even a motive for accumulation is often security-seeking (Jensen 1963; Laughlin 1956; von Holst 1967, p. 3) -- accumulation tends to clutter and to cause conflict, displeasure, or even shame (Phillips 1962; Novey and Novey 1987; Warren and Ostrander 1979). In his seventies who had accumulated three garages full of miscellaneous possessions was succumbing to pressure to discard these things so that they were not faced with the burden of having to do so after his death.

If collections are distinct from human accumulations, they are even farther from animal accumulations, despite the fact that they suggest a basis for collecting in animal behavior (e.g., Humphrey 1979). We assume, first of all, that animals -- such as squirrels for the winter -- lack the appreciation of any interactions within a set of interrelated objects (Stewart 1984, p. 18). An anonymous author notes:

A used postage stamp is to a man what a bone without flesh is to a dog: but the collector of postage stamps goes further than the dog, in that he prefers an old postage stamp to a new one, while no dog, however, would rather have a bone without flesh, would not rather have a bone with flesh on it. There is more to be said of a human collector, however, since he always has before him the ideal of a complete collection, which he probably, ever dreamed of acquiring specimens of all the different kinds of bones that there are in the world (Wohnston and Beddow 1986, pp. 13-15, quoting from an anonymous article in *The Times* [of London] 12, 1910; also quoted in Rowed 1920, pp. 6-7).

Unlike accumulation, hoarding is selective and active. But it differs from collecting by focusing on utilitarian items that they may be needed in the future (McKinnon, Smith, and Hunt 1985). Because the items hoarded are typically food staples, cleaning supplies, they are unlikely to take on the sacred character of collected objects. Simmel (1900) distinguishes the miser who hoards money from the numismatist who collects money, based on both the utilitarian character of the hoard and the sacredness of the collection. However both of these assumptions are challenged by the extreme case of a miser who starves or sells his possessions to save still more money (Belk and Wallendorf 1990b; Michaels 1985; Schwartz and Wolf 1958). But a further distinction between collecting and hoarding is that collecting involves differentiated objects and tends to follow the rule "no two alike," while hoarding is the same thing (Danet and Katriel 1989). By this criterion we can still classify the self-sacrificing miser as a hoarder rather than a collector.

Further, we do not regard as collectors those who acquire a set of items solely as an investment (e.g., Duggleby 1987). Certainly a collection may ultimately be sold due to financial need or a change in taste (e.g., Christ 1965). If the sole purpose for acquisition and possession, the items acquired are likely to lack the sacredness and unity found in a collector's collection. A collector who is also a dealer in the same collectible can remain a collector if the items in the collection and those for sale are kept separate. We find that this is common and that such dealers generally have firm rules that objects cannot be sold from the collection and the saleable stock of merchandise. The most prominent exception is that when the dealer upgrades his collection, superseded items may then be sold. Another exception is when a dealer becomes disenchanted with an entire collection and in order to undertake a new and different collecting enterprise. For dealers who also collect, price is a much more important factor in the buying of merchandise than in the case of acquiring items for the dealer's personal collection.

Care is needed in assessing investment motives however, since investment is sometimes given as an emic rationale for collecting, especially when collectors fear they will be ridiculed if their love of the collection is instead offered as a rationale for collecting (Belk 1988a; Paton 1988). While collectors frequently recount lore concerning the fortunes amassed by other collectors, they do not maintain their purchase prices, much less increase in value (Beards 1987). For this reason many collecting guides and financial newspapers, advise that new collectors pursue a collection for its intrinsic pleasure and not for expected financial gain. Still, for a few collectors at least, positive investment consequences can derive from passionate advocacy of an object. A collector has managed not only to indulge his obsession for Rodin sculptures, but also to build both the scholarly and the market value of the pieces (Cox 1978).

HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF COLLECTING

The history of collecting that follows is necessarily a brief sketch drawn with a broad brush. For more detailed information the reader might consult such excellent sources as Alsop (1982), Cabanne (1961), Caxton Publishing (1974), Coop

MacGregor (1985), Moulin (1967/1987), Rheims (1961), Rigby and Rigby (1944), Saarinen (1958), Stillinger (1980), (1967). However, for the most part, these treatments limit their foci to fine art collecting. The reasons for this bias the rich and elite collector are not difficult to discern. As Johnson (1986) notes:

Demand for certain types of objects is linked to taste and fashion.... Ownership of art objects is a personal status demonstrating wealth and discrimination. Possession of desirable objects confers gives aesthetic pleasure and is a form of investment. Collectors, dealers and institutions compete them.... Rich collectors can achieve renown merely by assembling collections of esteemed I work philanthropic act of donating a collection to a museum confers fame in that the name of the prev forever linked with the bequest and in some western countries has the added benefit of tax conce

In addition, it is art objects that most often are acquired through plunder, serving as trophies of conquest and vi powerful nations and individuals (Chamberlin 1983). And it is collections of art objects, rather than more humbl and other repositories have been inclined to preserve. Furthermore, published biographies and television treatr on the rich and famous who are the collectors of such art. As a result, the extant history of collecting is strongly collections.

History

The presence of unusual pebbles in 80,000-year-old Cro-Magnon caves in France suggests that collecting may ha human history as art (Neal 1980). The more widespread emergence of collections from hoards and accumulatio with the growth of civilizations supporting art and science. Ancient Mesopotamian royal collections in Chaldea, Assyria included gems, writings on clay tablets, birds, omens, and incantations (Taylor 1948, p. 7). It is clear from Tutankhamen's tomb that he collected walking sticks, staves, whips, mineral specimens, and toys (Rigby and Rig tomb also included relics of predecessor Egyptian collectors, including Amenhotep III's blue enamels and the bc foreign art collected by Thutmose III. While these collections reflect individual tastes, their collectors benefitted rights:

Not men but gods, however, were the greatest of the early collectors. Through their servants, the the priest-kings, it was they who took a toll of all the products of the land. The ancient temples, lil churches and monasteries of our own middle ages, were repositories for great accumulations of and literature; and the temple treasuries were the forerunners of our banks, our libraries, our mu these divine collectors began, as nearly as we can judge, with the collection of food and wealth, g soon to the collecting of books and [written] records, of art objects and antiques, of curiosities ar (Rigby and Rigby 1944, p. 96).

This was the case with the early religious sanctuaries of ancient Greece, which collected painted vases, furniture, vessels, and votive statues (Taylor 1948, p. 11). On feast days, the faithful were invited to see these treasures in th where the priests catalogued and guarded them (Caxton Publishing 1974, p. 9). Eventually, these temple collectio and exotic:

Piles of ivory ... barbarian costumes, Indian jewelry, snake skins, bear hides, elephant skulls, whale gorilla skins (thought to be those of "hairy, savage women"), reeds as thick as tree trunks, coconu mirrors, antique musical instruments, foreign weapons, curious vessels of all sorts (Rigby and Rig 115).

By the time of Alexander the Great, Greek art and antiquity collections began to be used to proclaim political an to acquire and demonstrate a cultural heritage. At about the same time, the individual collector finally emerged

Ancient Romans also sought to collect Greek antiquities and art, and by the second century B.C., the nage for co (Rheims 1961, pp. 8-9). Copies were suitable when the Greek originals were lacking and private collectors opene public on certain days. Antique dealers were established, and connoisseurs shopped the streets of Rome where and sculptors set up their businesses which occupied one-fourth of the city. Plunder was the major source of the

poured into Rome. Rivalries between collectors quickly developed. One unscrupulous collector, Gaius Verres, refused to relinquish his collection to Mark Antony (Caxton Publishing 1974, pp. 11-12). Petronius collected bow Nero. When Nero sent poison to him, the saucy writer drank it from a prize bowl that he smashed upon completion (135). Collections sometimes proved esoteric and eccentric. In the third century A.D., Heliogabalus is reported to have collected 10,000 pounds of cobwebs gathered (by his slaves) for his amusement (Tuan 1986).

At about the same time in China (the Han dynasty), manuscripts in literature, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, and the Imperial Library, along with silk paintings, bronze vessels, and other relics (Rigby and Rigby 1944, p. 114). When the Han dynasty fell in 221 A-D., there followed a 500-year stagnation in collecting until prosperity revived interest in art, literature, and science (pp. 145-153). When Rome was overrun in the fifth century A-D., the west was also plunged into the dark ages, and the center of collecting shifted to Constantinople where Byzantine art, manuscripts, jewels, and religious treasures were assembled by the emperor (pp. 10).

During the Middle Ages in Europe, wealth was concentrated among hereditary rulers and prelates of the Christian Church. Collecting was infrequent, even among the upper classes. Security was the predominant motivation for the limited collecting that did occur. Collectors were more concerned with the material value of their treasures than with their artistic or historical merit (Rigby and Rigby 1944, pp. 145-153). Numerous treasures were melted down for the monetary value of their gold, silver, or gems (Alsop 1982), we do not count them as part of our definition of a collection. The Church became the foremost repository of art, manuscripts, treasures, curiosities, and other religious centers developed a new collecting rivalry, as bones and bits of saints and sacred objects were collected (see Geary 1986; Sumption 1975). Pilgrims and crusaders returned with relics and curiosities that added to church collections. It was not until the twelfth century that individual collecting began to regain prominence.

With the Fourth Crusade's sacking of Constantinople in 1204, treasures and relics again began to appear in Europe. In the thirteenth century, Marco Polo also introduced Europe to the art of the Orient, providing still more exotic objects for collection. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, church power was declining, and newly wealthy European merchants were collecting a variety of luxury items -- tapestries, stained glass, reliefs, antiquities, coins, and heraldic signs, as well as paintings (Alsop 1982, pp. 154-155). Italy was in the forefront of such collecting, and the Medici collections were the most extravagant. By the fifteenth century, collecting was shaped by the "triumph of individualism" (Aries 1989, p. 7) which supported efforts to amass individual collections. With encouragement, art collecting became an important enough focus of European society that the names of great collectors became known. In the sixteenth century, names of the famous collectors themselves were equally well known (Rheims 1961, p. 11). In the seventeenth centuries, starting in northern Germany, the *Wunderkammer* (cabinet of wonders) became a popular form of collecting. The *Kunstkammer* (art cabinet) and *Schatzkammer* (treasury) among the royalty and wealthy (see Impey and MacGregor 1985). Eclecticism, the promise of magic, and curiosity were key elements in assembling the contents of a wunderkammer. Historical records that one such collection included: lamps and ink wells made of seashells, musical and mathematical instruments, Mexican curios, the rope with which Judas supposedly hanged himself, ostrich eggs, mosaics of hummingbirds' nests, pearls, jurists and beautiful women, carved cherry pits, automata, objects of ivory and coral, a peg used in King Solomon's temple, sharks' teeth, and a coconut mounted in silver. Such an assortment of objects could be found among royalty, as well as in religious collections -including those of the Popes and those at the Royal Abbey of Saint Denis (Taylor 1985). In part, the ideal was to show one's breadth by such a collection, but the exploration of the New World also stimulated collecting. Rare and unusual. Whereas the medieval ideal was the compendia or systematization of knowledge of the world, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries interest shifted to finding new knowledge and to "collecting the world" (Defert 1982). Along with various forms of collecting, Christopher Columbus returned to Lisbon with native Americans who were exhibited in the capitols of Europe (Alsop 1982). The collection of the world sometimes involved collecting written accounts and people (however objectionable to our definition) as well as things brought back from various expeditions, exemplifies our definitional contention that collecting is the accumulation of objects.

The scientific revolution that began in the late 17th century is characterized as Cartesian thinking after Rene Descartes. The scientific point has been described by Berman (1981), following Max Weber, as the "disenchantment of the world." The scientific revolution in science in this epoch was clearly manifested in collecting. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collection became a scientific activity. The artistic versus scientific foci being the first fundamental split (Belk 1986, pp. 11-12; Caxton Publishing 1974, pp. 4). Museums since the destruction of the Mouseion at Alexandria also formed along these two lines during the late 18th century.

nineteenth centuries Wexander 1979). Royal and private collections were most often transformed into public institutions, thus allowing the public to view and admire the formerly private treasures of the wealthy. The process gradually eliminated the more bizarre curiosities, although the fascination with the curious remained longer in the

It appears that a several hundred year trend toward the democratization of collecting has accelerated in the twentieth century and more people collecting. This has been possible only partly through rising real incomes, since the control of funds was concentrated in the hands of the wealthy and museums. The stronger impetuses for more widespread collecting have been the conceptualization of things that are collectible, the accelerated production of identical objects in series or sets, and the fact that old things are seen as worth preserving. Museums have aided this trend by displaying increasingly diverse material in an array of offerings, with more marketing-oriented merchandising strategies (Kelly 1986). The democratization of collecting has been aided by the increasingly branded and differentiated set of products available in the marketplace, providing additional

Contemporary Institutional Dimensions of Collecting

The commoditization/singularization dialectic (Kopytoff 1986) that drives much collecting behavior in consumer culture is the institutionalization of collecting. The symbolic value of a singularized item is frequently reinforced by a high monetary value that ever circulates in exchange relationships after its acquisition. The symbiosis of symbolic and exchange value (or dimensions) is apparent in the following examples:

* Movie memorabilia is especially rewarding to collectors. A pair of "ruby slippers" worn in the 1938 film *The Wizard of Oz* fetched \$165,000 from a collector. Another paid \$12,000 for a uniform worn by Elvis Presley in *Grease*. A large poster for *Casablanca* goes for \$17,500. A biweekly guide entitled *Movie Collector's World* has over 5,000 subscribers (Dunn 1988).

* The founder of the G.I. Joe Club of America, himself an owner of over 500 of the action figures, has recently build a national monument to the character. Early model versions of the toy now sell for more than \$100 (Pereira 1989).

* A teddy bear was recently sold by Sotheby's for a record price of \$85,000 (Millership 1989). The collector also dispersed items from Andy Warhol's collection that commanded similarly astonishing prices: a pair of jars went for \$247,830; a Black Mackintosh table for \$275,000; a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow for \$77,000; and three Campbell's soup can banks for \$7,150 (Cox 1988).

* Before the collapse of the junk bond barons at Drexel Burnham, Lambert, the firm was able to dispose of much of its material (coffee mugs, T-shirts, tennis balls and other office bric-a-brac) as collectible items and to dispose of it quite profitably (Herman 1990).

* Among the rapidly appreciating speculative investments some experts view as a hedge against consumer market downturns are Elvis memorabilia, presidential autographs, rare books, toy figurines and model cars (1930's - 1940's) and muscle (1950's - 1960's) cars produced by American manufacturers (Gottschalk 1990; Peers 1988).

* The profitability of collectibles has fueled a rise in such activity as the counterfeiting of baseball cards (Wright 1989), the use of baseball cards as promotional premiums in such products as laundry detergents and the manufacturing of hood ornament replicas (Wright 1989).

* Collecting behavior radiates to increasingly novel niches. With the rise of direct marketing activities, the telephone card has become a collectible for some consumers (Crossen 1989). In Japan, prepaid magnetic cards that render service encounters more automatic and convenient have spawned a market of more than 10 million collectors (Kilburn 1988). Socially responsible collecting has been promoted as a marketing vehicle through efforts such as documentary projects (n.a. 1990).

That collecting can be both passionate and profitable is a common observation (Crispell 1988; Klein 1990; Lynwa

Trachtenberg 1990; Wartzman 1990). That a collecting "industry" and elaborate social network of voluntary associations supports the enterprise is less commonly acknowledged.

A number of discrete institutions comprises the collecting industry. Formal sector organizations such as auctioneers, Sotheby's, or the thousands of galleries which constitute the infrastructure of the art world, are perhaps the most prominent as a result of their importance to society's aesthetic domain of experience. Similarly, museums are widely recognized for their contribution to the preserving of a collectively constructed and valued version of a material cultural past. The rise of unconventional museums (Jurnovoy and Jenness 1987) celebrating less hegemonic or elitist visions of cultural preservation or preservationist ethos. The cultural significance of these organizations is explored in later pages of this chapter. For collectibles such as rare documents have begun to spring up in shopping malls, angering purists concerned about packaging, gimmickry, and forgery (Yoshihashi 1990). Vehicles such as *Rinker's Antiques and Collectibles Market* and Collectibles Information Service, instruct consumers in all phases of the collecting enterprise. Informal or alternative organizations (Sherry 1990a; 1990b) such as flea markets and garage sales constitute another important conduit.

Of particular importance to this chapter is the existence of specific institutions whose mission is the mass-merchandising of "collectibles" to consumers desiring to own special objects with perceived investment value. Firms such as the Franklin Mint, the Franklin Library, the New England Collectors Society, and the Danberry Mint, among others, serve their clients. These firms provide important search and validation services to consumers for whom the joy of treasure hunting is exhilarating as the certainty of authentication is comforting (Beckham and Brooks 1989). For many, the thrill of the anticipation of the inevitable arrival of a preselected item, rather than in the discovery in which a personal grail is sought, commercial "societies" reinforce the social and economic significance of aspects of collecting behavior by preparing consumers. Firms such as Hummel, Lladro and Waterford, among others similarly encourage collecting by promoting value or point-of-difference resides in their collectibility. Thus the commercialization of a social activity - the collecting - is at once a cooptation and a reinforcement of an important consumer behavior.

Collecting is institutionalized in a number of other commercial formats. For example, the magazine *Memories* is marketed to whom nostalgia -- a culture-bound syndrome discussed in later pages - has become a salient experience. The magazine collect a mass-mediated past which is promoted as an integral component of their extended selves. The Cable Vision shows as "Collectibles" and "The Doll Collector" among its programming fare. Many newspapers now run regular "Collectibles" which read as commercial analogs to more traditional advice columns. Entire newspapers themselves marketed as "collectibles", and sold to enshrine such "big events" as the Kennedy assassination, or such personal milestones as a birthday; the edition for a particular date is often offered in an enshrining document case. Each of these vehicles reinforces the significance of collecting -- whether it be the economic utility, the aesthetics of connoisseurship, or the fraternalism - for society at large.

Finally, the prevalence of voluntary societies of collectors is worthy of note. Such societies may be relatively informal. For example, many collectors are socialized into a family of orientation where collecting is a valued ethic, and in turn transmit that ethic of procreation into the collecting ethic. Intergenerational transfer of collecting behavior, rather than of specific items, may be a common phenomenon. Participation in a shared hobby or communal ritual seems to be an important integrative mechanism for families of collectors. Other voluntary societies are much more formally constituted, providing individuals with a structure to identify and interact, based upon a particular passion. For instance, at the 10th National Sports Collectors' Convention in Chicago, collectors could buy from and sell to a range of dealers and exhibitors, have items autographed by a hero, attend seminars ranging from entrepreneurship through ethics to estate planning, obtain formal and informal advice on collecting (e.g. sourcing, authenticating, pricing), and engage in the kinds of after-hours socializing that pushes the nominal affiliation forward into the organic solidarity characteristic of small group culture. There appear to be a number of associations of collectors as there are categories of collectibles. These associations serve to reinforce the social significance of collecting in consumer culture. Perhaps ironically, such associations may mitigate some of the alienation that the enterprise engender.

SIGNIFICANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF COLLECTING

O'Brien (1981) estimated that one of every three Americans currently collects something. Another study found

households surveyed reported that they have at least one collection, with an average of 2.6 collections per household (McCarthy 1981). Even if these figures are exaggerated, at least according to our definition of collecting, it is evident that collecting has diffused to a large portion of the population in affluent nations. Almost ten percent of American men and four percent of both men and women collect stamps (Crispell 1988). Thus, one reason to study the neglected phenomenon is the large number of people it involves and the large amount of time, talent, effort, and money they spend pursuing it. Another reason is that collecting represents a striking form of consumption. Since, by definition, the objects in a collection are not in ordinary everyday use, the passion, rivalry, and marketplace attention that these objects engender challenges rational economic analysis. Furthermore, collected objects often require considerable time and effort to maintain (Aristides 1988; Durham 1988) and often produce a financial loss rather than a profit, if indeed they can be sold at all (Cox 1985). Thus, while we shall delay our critical assessment until a later point we note Singh's (1988) assessment that collecting celebrates ownership and that collectors are driven by "the desire for ownership" (p. 86). Even without celebration and obsession, collecting appears to be a quintessential form of accumulation involving extreme concentration and care lavished upon the collection by its collector. Perhaps a principal contribution of future research on collecting would be a systematic collection of biographies and life histories of collectors (e.g., Carmichael 1988) that would capture something of the richness of motivation driving this form of consumption.

The importance of collecting may also depend upon its distribution and symbolic significance in the population. Does the phenomenon of collecting transcend boundaries of age, gender, and social class? Do collections act as signs of status?

Age. Our interviews with young collectors suggest that they are encouraged and often started in collecting by parents. Mechling (1989) finds that youth organizations have done much to encourage collecting by children. In some cases, parents act as mentor and guide. Several fathers encouraged their sons' baseball-card collecting and visited shops, card collecting conventions with them. Collections of natural materials like minerals and seashells often depend upon adults taking children to collecting sites. Adults nurture children's collecting activity; we have encountered no incidents of intentional discouragement. Collecting is a cultural model "of" and model "for" reality, in Geertz's (1973) sense. Through collecting, the individual learns the rules of social cultural pursuits, and that activity should be directed toward becoming what you own. Danet and Katriel (1989) found that among the ultra-orthodox Jews of the Mea Shearim quarter of Jerusalem, children are encouraged to collect and trade cards of various rabbis. A U. S. firm, Torah Personalities, Inc., markets trading cards of the world's most famous living and deceased rabbis. "statistics" on the card's obverse side (Time 1989).

During the first third of the twentieth century, there were a number of surveys of collecting activity among children. One found that grade school children had an average of three to four active collections and that peak collecting years were between ages seven and eleven (Burk 1900). While a 1927 study reported a lower incidence of collecting and concluded that collecting was declining with age (Lehman and Witty 1927), a 1929 study using different methods found an even higher incidence of collecting among children (Whitley 1929). In follow-up studies Witty and Lehman (1930, 1931) found that, during peak collecting years, girls had ten collections and boys eleven. Durost (1932) reported that boys' collecting activity peaked at age ten with an average of 11.5 collections, girls' collecting peaked at age 11 with an average of 12.1 collections. A recent study in Israel found that, between ages seven and eleven, at least 84 percent of both boys and girls collect something, although in eighth grade these figures drop to below 50 percent (Crispell 1988). From all these studies, it is clear that collecting is more common among children than among adults. Its popularity peaks during adolescence and the desire to individuate through doing rather than having (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-McLenon 1981). At this age, the collection may constitute the self, and the self may be seen as part of the collection. Even though collecting is often a return to childhood, one inhibition to collecting as an adult appears to be the fear that others will think that the collector is indulgent (Bloom 1989; Kozden 1989; Olmsted 1988a). Another inhibition, no doubt, is the amount of time involved. Finally, the wider availability of other channels for attaining a sense of mastery and identity as an adult.

Although collections are sometimes liquidated for financial reasons during old age (Christ 1965), collections begun in childhood are often continued over a lifetime (e.g., Dannefer 1981; Olmsted 1987b). Indeed, increased time resources after retirement often lead to increased collections (Dannefer 1980). The community of fellow collectors can also be an important source of satisfaction. Because of the specialized nature of most collections, they are not likely to produce integration among neighborhood friends (Ullmer 1985).

Gender. The studies just reviewed consistently find that, among youthful collectors, girls are at least as likely as boys to collect. However, the literature suggests that men are more likely to collect than are women (Danet and Katriel 1989; Olmsted 1988a; Wallendorf 1990a). Rigby and Rigby (1944, pp. 326-327) suggest that the economic requirements and the competition for status among men are more likely to lead to collecting than among women.

traditionally favored males. Danet and Katriel (1986, p. 48) argue that the proactive mastery involved in collecting more passive and familial social roles that have been encouraged for women. And Saisselin (1984, p. 68) contend purchasing has been viewed as serious and purposeful collecting, while women's buying has been perceived as (consumption. As Baekeland (1981) emphasizes:

we rarely think of accumulations of dresses, shoes, perfumes, china and the like as collections.... [Men's] collections, however, be they of stamps, cars, guns or art, tend to have clear-cut thematic emphases and standards, external reference points in public or private collections. Thus women's collections tend to be personal and ahistorical, men's impersonal and historical (p. 47).

One need only look to the array of shoes assembled by Madame Marcos to find one inflated example of this distinction. However, it might be argued that women's collecting is transmuted into domestic production. That is, women buy shoes "consumption" in their creation of the domestic economy. That economy might be regarded in part as a "living museum" more complete examination of collecting activity indicates its essentially androgynous qualities. While acquisition, competition and mastery, preservation of a collection requires care, creativity, and nurturance (Belk and Wallendorf 1990a) activity requires characteristics stereotypically associated with both genders.

A second question with regard to the connection between gender and collecting is whether males and females tend to collect different types of things. While not all objects are seen to be gendered (Allison, Golden, Mullet, and Coogan 1980; Golden, Allison, and Mullet 1981) objects are. Gender can be imparted through strong design differences as with motorcycles versus motor scooters through more subtle features as with the size, shape, and ornamentation of hair brushes (Forty 1986). The historical collectors, cited previously, confirm that boys tend to collect different objects (e.g., marbles, nails, insects) than girls (e.g., photographs).

Among adults in our sample of 192 collectors, some of the strongest gender differences we have found among collectors is the overwhelming predominance of males among firearms collectors (cf. Olmsted 1987a, 1988b, forthcoming; Stenroos 1987; collectors (cf. Dannefer 1980, 1981). We also find men to be conspicuously more likely to collect antiques, books, and other objects, while women are more likely to collect animal replicas, jewelry, and housewares such as dishes and silverware (Wallendorf 1990a). Other studies have found men to be more likely to collect stamps and coins than are women (Olmsted 1987b). Interestingly, Sigmund Freud's collection of antiquities includes a large number of phallic amulets and statues. Similarly, the ubiquitous statuettes in his collection can be interpreted as phallic (Spitz 1989; cf. Holbrook 1989) as if Freud were acting out the satirical tale of Flaubert's naive collectors, Bouvard & Pecuchet:

At one time towers, pyramids, candles, mile-posts, and even trees had the significance of phalluses. For Bouvard and Pecuchet everything became a phallus. They collected the swing-bars of carriages, lamp posts, armchairs, cellar bolts, chemists' pestles. When anyone came to see them, they asked: 'What do you like?' -- then confided the mystery-, and if the visitor protested, they shrugged their shoulders peacefully (1880/1954, p. 131).

Again, the models of/ models for reality analogy is apt. Collecting enables males to celebrate aggressive behavior, hunt, and ultimately shaping the realm of political economy. Collecting enables females to enact behaviors create which shape domestic economy.

Our case studies of a husband and wife who both collected for most of their lives provide an informative contrast to collecting. The woman, whose husband posthumously enshrined her collection in a museum called the Mouse Collection, collected mice replicas. The collection began during her childhood when she acquired the nickname "Mouse" because, according to a brochure, she was "so clever and charming in character and petite in stature." Her lifelong collection consists of mice replicas, displayed in homey pseudo-antique golden oak furniture, around a perennial Christmas tree, and in a dominant pattern of Christmas as "woman's work" (Cheal 1987, 1988; Caplow 1982, 1984) and the association of miniaturized with women and children (Stewart 1984) reinforce the dominant theme of domestication in the Mouse Collection. A feature of the collection is its Mickey Mouse replicas. In this regard it is instructive that when Mickey was initially introduced, his appearance and masculine voice, he lacked his current popularity. Only by means of an emasculating voice char-

androgynous appearance, and a concomitant social clumsiness with female mice, did Mickey gain popularity (Mickey Mouse). The diminutive mouse (n.b. Mickey rather than Mike or Michael) is nevertheless the hero in Disney comics. He is the guile of a child in overcoming more adult-like villains, thus fulfilling a common childhood fantasy.

Mouse's husband also institutionalized his major collection (fire engines) by establishing the Fire Museum. In contrast to Mouse Cottage, this museum of fire-fighting equipment (billed as the world's largest) is spacious, has a guide, and a brochure all emphasize that this is a serious historical museum, in contrast to the entertainment museum of Mouse Cottage. Two other collections of this collector have also been given display space: (1) his collection of paintings of American cowboys and Indians and (2) his collection of African hunting trophies that began with a family hunting trip to Africa.

The collections of these two spouses present a graphic illustration of gender differences found in other collections. The differences were detected independently by the two authors who conducted research at these sites. Using the gendered pairs of Cottage:Fire Museum:XY, we note these relevant pairs of X and Y --

Tiny : Gigantic

Weak : Strong

Home : World

Nature : Machine

Nurturing : Extinguishing

Art : Science

Playfulness : Seriousness

Decorative : Functional

Inconspicuous : Conspicuous

Animate : Inanimate

Belk and Wallendorf (1990a) also discuss further cases of gendered identity work including two collections of Barbie dolls and fire engines, these collectibles can provide a circumscribed arena in which a variety of gender and other identity issues are worked out. In the Barbie doll cases studied however, the key gender identity issues center on the recent radical mastectomy undergone by the Barbie doll collectors and the homosexuality of the other. In both cases these collectors were able to express and negotiate their gender identity using their doll collections.

Social Class. A final issue in the distribution of collecting concerns its locus in the class structure of American society. The poor are precluded from many collecting realms due to their low income. Although the wealth of the mouse and fire engine collectors just discussed belies the common assumption that the wealthy collect only fine art, it remains true that collectors of fine art are almost always at least moderately wealthy (Moulin 1967/ 1987). Since virtually anything is collectible (Reid 1987), a collector can always find some affordable category of objects to collect. Therefore, income is not necessarily a barrier to collecting. A survey of subscribers to a general collecting magazine found that the sample had a median income about 30 percent above the population median and was over 70% white collar (Treas and Brannen 1976). Bossard and Boll (1950) found that the upper middle class is most likely to collect than the middle class, although more recent studies have found that the working and middle class are also active in such areas of collecting as baseball cards (Bloom 1989) and stamps (Bryant 1982; Olmsted 1987b). Rochberg-Halton (1985) found that although visual art was cited as a favorite possession more frequently by members of the upper middle class in her study, it was more frequently cited by lower class informants. Our own data (based on the sample of 192 informants) suggest that the area of fine art collecting, most collecting areas (including automobiles) appear to be dominated by the middle class. The art galleries specializing in sales to collectors have successfully targeted the large middle class in the U.S. (e.g., Butsch 1984).

In sum, contemporary collecting is unevenly but broadly distributed across age, gender, and socioeconomic categories. The heightened acquisitive and possessive orientation that epitomizes the modern consumer culture. The considerable skill, and energy devoted to collecting also help to make it a consumption activity eminently worthy of study. But collecting is a passionate sphere of consumption from which collectors seem to derive significant meaning and fulfillment. In Stebbins' (1982) terms, serious leisure (cf. Bloch and Bruce 1984). Smith and Apter (1977, p. 65), thus, observe

Finally, collecting antiques, like any hobby pursued with intensity and passion, helps to give life meaning and purpose. The goals of antique collecting may at first seem arbitrary and the activity may initially be motivated by excitement ... but for many people the goals eventually become serious and building the collection for some people to take on almost religious proportions.

This point is well illustrated in a recent play by Terrence McNally (1989) entitled *The Lisbon Traviata*. McNally's first full-length theatrical production that takes record collecting as its central theme (but see Eisenberg 1987). On a love quadrangle involving four homosexual men, two of whom (Mendy and Stephen) are held together emotionally by their devotion to opera in general and to the performances of Maria Callas in particular. Thus, much of the action and plot revolve around Mendy's desperation to hear a new bootleg recording of Maria singing *La Traviata* in Lisbon. This is guaranteed to move any compassionate record collector to the deepest commiseration. In this, it reflects the pleasure of musical fanaticism and obsession with opera recordings and performances:

In the first act of McNally's play, audiences are treated to an encounter between two rabid fans of Maria Callas.... Mendy goes into a frenzy when Stephen mentions a pirated recording he owns of a performance of *Traviata* sung by Callas in Lisbon in 1958.... Most of the first act dwells on the two men's obsession with Callas and their disdain for other great singers.... McNally, himself, admits to having been an ardent Callas fan during the Golden Age of Opera (Botto 1989, p. 66).

In Act II, we find that Stephen's apartment features row upon row of vertical shelves that house literally thousands of records arranged in a well-organized order that permits him to pluck examples of interest from the filing system with barely a thought. For comic thrust, Stephen recounts how he had to explain to his father why anyone would want more than one recording of the same music. "For the same reason," he says, "that you need to watch the Super Bowl again every year." Thus does the distinction between the two, even those among performances of the same composition by the same artists recorded on different occasions. McNally's play deals primarily with classical music in general and opera in particular, the same fanatic interest in music appears in the desire of jazz fans to hear alternate takes of pieces played sometimes only minutes or seconds apart from the stature of (say) Lester Young or Charlie Parker. Similarly, "Deadhead" fans of the Grateful Dead strive to make, to attend every concert by the group (Pearson 1987). In the case of McNally's comic hero, the obsession with hearing and collecting recordings of performances by a favorite artist borders on the pathological. But, in general, the extent to which such subtle distinctions are observed is the *essence* of the true collecting spirit.

A THEORY OF COLLECTING

What Collections Mean

Magic. One key to understanding the intensity with which collections are pursued is the finding that collections are treated as sacred. In the vocabulary, the items in a collection are frequently "sacred" (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). We have already seen that the contents of a collection are usually set apart from the ordinary. Asked whether she ever eats using her collection, collector W 30) replied, "Never! I never use it. You know why? Its because they're completely non-functional." Collector M 30) collection, it does not leave, except in the case of serial collections and upgrading. A collector of nutcrackers (W 30) never uses them to crack nuts, was asked if nutcrackers ever leave her collection: "Nol *No way*. (laughs) They're stay mine." A couple (W M 65/WF 65) who collect saltcellars was observed serving a holiday feast using saltcellars and other objects from the sacred collection. Similarly, as previously noted, we find that collector/dealers generally keep their collections separated from profane saleable merchandise and do not tolerate traffic between the two. It is as if the value of collected objects would be diminished if they were treated as market commodities and removed from the safe haven of the collection.

The magical quality of objects in a collection is also revealed by the reverent care given to them. Fieldnotes from some of this fetishistic attention:

One man driving his car in the "parade" awaiting space assignment, jumped out of his car when it stopped and polished the wheels a bit. One person used a paintbrush to get the dust out of his grill. Another man was doing finishing touches to the chrome around his headlights with a toothbrush.

In a similar vein, Dannefer reports a car collector's response to a woman who asked where she could put her Corvair anywhere except on the white car -- that's God" (1980, p. 393). For some, this concern for these metal objects of life itself. One informant (WM 60s) has a will leaving his Model A Fords to his 14-year-old grandson. but the will stipulating that if the grandson violates them or doesn't care for them properly, they will be sold to a professional who will appreciate them. Another owner of four restored cars (WM 60) has willed one to each of his four children: "They will take care of them. If they don't, I'll come back and haunt them." And a recently divorced shell collector (WM late 30s) lives in a house and children but his ex-wife kept the shells that she refers to as "her babies." Such personification is an important part of fetishizing objects (Ellen 1988). While Stewart (1984) distinguishes collecting from fetishism based on the order that we disagree and see collecting as often fetishistic. In our view, the compulsive desire for order in the collection of objects is fetishism.

Reverence for the power of the collected objects is also displayed in other ways. Clark (1963, p. 15) notes that "I always found myself whispering, as if I were in church." Collectors of contemporary art, like the billionaires who collect art from Joseph Duveen (Behrman 1952), find themselves wondering "Am I good enough to own this painting?" Katriel (1986, p. 38) refer to such reverence as "thing magic." Laughlin (1956) calls collections -- along with talismans, tokens, relics, and charms -- "soterial objects," after the Greek *Soteria*, meaning "objects that deliver one from evil."

Besides delivering them from evil, collectors also hope that the extraordinary power of collected objects will deliver the world of everyday life into a magical world. This belief is evident in the treasure tales that surround most collections. They typically involve a discerning collector using a combination of cleverness and luck to acquire a rare and valuable object (e.g., Beards 1987). In one tale, shyly told but fervently believed, a car collector (late 30s) recalled searching for a truck that he and his deceased father had once fixed up. As the fieldnotes record:

He had looked for it for much of the 11 years since he got rid of it, but with no luck. They had lost it. They had had some other difficulties, so they had despondently gone to his father's grave. He and his father had a lot of racing together and were close. He told his father that if he was alright to give him a sign. So he said that, a friend told him about a Cameo, and they went to see it. When he saw the "R. & R Racing" one, he knew it was his old truck and bought it. Ron's wife said they weren't very religious, but that made believe.

It often seems that the collector is assembling a miniature world that he or she can control and rule over (Berge 1989; Katriel 1989, p. 263; Stewart 1984, p. 162). If so, it is an enchanted world of magical objects not unlike the fairy tale world (Stewart 1975).

Other Times, Other People, and Other Places. if collections evoke magical worlds, they are aided in this evocation by their distant, exotic otherness (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen 1989) displaced in time or space from the here and now. They are imbued with the aura of the time, place, and persons once associated with it; for instance, a collection of rocks from past trips (Appleyard 1979). In fact, Urry (1990, p. 32) has characterized contemporary tourists as "collectors of gazes" who are revisiting the same exotic sites than in capturing the "initial gaze" of the other. Because collecting is a longitudinal activity, the collection of contemporary art acquires historical markers over the history of the collection. A common incentive to collect is to conserve, assemble, preserve, or rescue objects. More generally, such activity is often part of a search for self-meaning.

The ability of a collection to evoke other places is seen among two informants who totally devote their houses to collecting from particular places -- one from Bali and the other from Nigeria and nearby African countries. In each case, the collections in these countries, although the collections were acquired over a period of time and continue to grow with return trips, with furniture, wall decorations, masks, musical instruments, carvings, and other artwork from the foreign lands.

material overflows numerous glass front cases and is stacked up to five items high in each room on all three floors. In every house, every piece recalls for the collector the story of its acquisition. The initial guided tour in one of these homes is a literal way, stamp collections and books provide means of tangibly acquiring other places. One of Olmsted's (1988) "Stamp collecting is also a way of traveling and getting acquainted with other countries" (p. 3). Although she notes (1988) relives adventures of climbing in the Alps through her collection of Alpine climbing books and journals, and offers "any keener invitation to take an ego-trip down Memory Lane" (p. 480).

Not only place, but also time is acquired and made manifest in a collection. Sigmund Freud's interest in collecting Greece, Rome, and Egypt appears to have arisen in part from his fascination with the Egyptian illustrations in the murals at his home as a child (Kuspit 1989). Some of his antiquities were acquired during his travels to the ruins of these places. When these pieces were brought home, they served as reminders, "promising him that after the long winter in Vienna (1951, p. 109). In fact, Freud's travels were often shaped by his penchant for collecting, as Walter (1988) notes:

During his visit to America in 1909 he showed no interest in the country, saying that all he wanted was Niagara Falls. Refusing to read travel books before the trip, he studied a book on Cyprus instead. He wanted to see the principal collection of Cyprian antiquities that was on exhibit in New York. In that place that attracted him was the Metropolitan Museum, where he spent his time absorbed in the antiquities of Greece (pp. 102-103).

Not incidentally, Freud also used archeological metaphors in his work -- as in his references to psychoanalysis as an excavation and his symbolic interpretations of key myths such as that of Oedipus. It has even been suggested that his craft of psychoanalysis was dominated by an object-oriented passion for archaeology (Walter 1988, p. 111). In Kuspit's view, "it is some of the heroic quality associated with archaeology rub off on psychoanalysis" (1989, pp. 133-134). The collector's (1981) words, is "an archaeologist without a spade" (p. 71). As Rheims (1961) reflects:

An object's date is of prime importance to a collector with an obsession for the past. He values it for its associations, that it once belonged to and was handled by a man he can visualize as himself. The collector is a witness: its possession is an introduction to history. One of a collector's most entrancing day-dreams is the imaginary joy-of uncovering the past in the guise of an archaeologist (p. 211).

In this daydream the collector also magically transcends time and travels to another era.

The desire to bask in the imagined glory of the past is also evident in the strong emotional attachment that many collectors have to the persons, eras, and places that their collections represent (e.g., Kaplan 1982; Stillinger 1980). Collections of farthings (Miller 1981), autographs, locks of hair in Victorian hair wreaths (Miller 1982, Payne 1988), and contemporary baseball cards are common. The attraction is all the stronger when the contagious magic of a prominent provenance is attached to the collection. Thus, one collector was especially attached to an antique music box because it once belonged to Winifred (1922) observed:

When, after six years' absence in the South Seas and Australia, I returned to Europe and did my first sightseeing at Edinburgh Castle, I was shown the Crown Jewels. The keeper told many stories of how they were worn by this and that king or queen on such and such an occasion.... I had the feeling that something important had been told to me.... And then arose before me the vision of a native village on coral soil ... and one of them showing me thin red strings and big worn-out objects, clumsy to sight and greasy to touch. With reverence he also would name them and tell their story.... Both heirlooms and *vaygu'a* are collected because of the historical sentiment which surrounds them. However ugly, useless, and -- according to modern standards -- valueless an object may be, if it has figured in historical scenes and passed through the hands of historic persons, and is therefore an unfailing vehicle of important sentimental associations, it can be as precious to us (pp. 88-89).

Sometimes this attachment even takes on metaphysical qualities. Three different antique collectors we have interviewed have an unaccountable attraction to and intuitive knowledge about particular antiques- as being due to some associator

mystical sense, many collectors strive after an image of their own childhood through their collections. As France & *Collecting Hobbies* magazine explains:

People want things from their childhood for two reasons. Either they had something as a child and memories of it, or they wanted it and couldn't have it, so they're buying it for themselves now (Clifford 1985, p. 39).

Having objects from our past can provide a sense of stability in our lives (Forty 1986). Baseball-card collectors recreate childhood collections by trying to recreate a childhood collection that their mothers once discarded (Bloom 1989). There is a striving to regain love and security in these cases. The acquisition of objects desired earlier in life is evident among collectors who begin in mid-life by acquiring the car they had or wished they could have had as an adolescent. Like Dannefer's collectors we interviewed said they can predict the market price of cars by anticipating increased popularity of the models they reached 40 were in high school. Increased financial resources at this stage of life may facilitate this tendency, but the tendency begins earlier in life at mid-life and the more general nostalgic inclination to use collections of the past to give meaning to the present are motivating factors (Belk 1990, Davis 1979).

Because the collection takes the collector into a new realm of experience (baseball cards into the world of childhood, fashion models, stamps into exotic lands), it allows pleasurable expression of fantasy (Gotelli 1988, Rheinboldt 1988). Through such activity, the collector can potentially experiment with a fantasy life without suffering the consequences of enacting it (Friday 1975).

Thus, for various reasons, collections signal other times and other places. As the preceding section emphasizes, these meanings are basic to all collectors and collections. The next section explores other meanings of collection and motivations for collecting.

Motivations for Collecting

Acquisitiveness Legitimized as Art or Science. While many motivations have been offered to explain collecting, two are useful in understanding the pervasiveness of collecting are legitimization and self-extension. Legitimization concerns society to approve or condone behavior that might otherwise be construed as acquisitiveness, possessiveness, or obsession. The process of learning what defines legitimate collecting and "collecting" and "collectors" to certain activities and people. The process of learning what defines legitimate collecting and childhood, as Clifford (1985) explains:

Children's collections are revealing ... a boy's accumulation of miniature cars, a girl's dolls, a sumo doll, a "nature museum" (with labeled stones and shells, a hummingbird in a bottle), a treasured bowl filled with bright-colored shavings of crayons. In these small rituals we observe the channeling of obsession into a socially acceptable form, in how to make the world one's own, to gather things around oneself tastefully, appropriately. The same process that allows all collections reflect wider cultural rules, of rational taxonomy, of gender, of aesthetics. *An excessive, sometimes even rapacious need to have is transformed into rule-governed, meaningful desire.* The collector, who must possess, but cannot have it all, learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies -- to make a collection (p. 238, italics added).

Thus do we begin the process of channeling our materialistic desires into "meaningful" pursuits; to become collectors or misers; to produce knowledge and beauty rather than displaying selfishness.

The general social sanction for collecting over hoarding and accumulating is sometimes aided by self-deception. The collector of elephant replicas told us he expected that history will some day stand in awe of what he has accomplished in building his collection. Specialized clubs (including one for elephant replica collectors), publications, shows, and meetings help foster the social legitimacy of collecting. Olmsted (1987a, p. 16) detects this legitimization process in the rhetoric of gun collectors at gun shows. The process operating through the "community of [common] knowledge" and boundary-establishing stories among collectors. We observed a similar set of legitimizing activities at a meeting of a midwestern "sports [baseball card] collecting club." The club quiz asking 20 questions such as: who has the highest batting average in baseball this year, who has the most American League home runs, who is leading in stolen bases. The person with the most correct answers (after a tie breaker between the two who

tickets to-an upcoming baseball game. At the same meeting, one of the several members who had attended a national collectors show reported on what took place there. A debate on whether to spend \$13,000 and first-class airfare to take Kaline (in the baseball Hall of Fame) to the local show was followed by a show-and-tell in which members appreciated other's recent card acquisitions. Each of these activities, in addition to the large meeting turnout, helped club members feel that collecting is justified, legitimate, and important.

The general legitimization of collections, coupled with tenuous price guides and rationalizations that collecting is a hobby that even a person who is not normally materialistic or self-indulgent can safely exercise these traits in the arena (Meyer pp. 349-355) describes John D. Rockefeller, Jr. as such a man. Even though he was fond of jewels, collecting art was not for himself to come to what he perceived as self-indulgence. He argued that since these works would eventually be sold, he could feel guilt-free in acquiring them and possessing them for a time. Meyer (1973) notes this legitimization of collecting as a grandiosity:

The great collector has a sense of destiny, a feeling that he is mankind's agent in gathering and preserving what might otherwise be heedlessly dispersed. And the collector is capable of collecting anything -- from a complete cabinet of all varieties of Coca-Cola bottles, while another displays an array of Ford Race Cars (Meyer 187).

Whether a collection is believed to be legitimized as contributing to art or to science depends in part upon what the collector depends upon the type of collector. For instance, Rubens kept an extensive art collection in his studio, but rather than for aesthetic inspiration, it served a more scientific or technical purpose in providing examples for his assistants (Belk 1982). The type A collector takes the taxonomic approach thought to characterize science, while the type B collector takes the thought to predominate in the world of art (Danet and Katriel 1989). In both cases, the rigorous pursuit of these activities reflects confidence in the acceptability and importance of their activity. And as others have observed, underlying the acceptance of these ways is a desire for security (Belk 1982; Beaglehole 1932; Danet and Katriel 1986; Rigby and Rigby 1944; Saxe 1987).

Collections as Extensions of Self. Another general motive for collecting, at least in an individualistic and possessive culture, is an expanded or improved sense of self through gathering and controlling meaningful objects or experiences. As Johnson (1987) notes:

No unprejudiced observer will lightly deny the existence of an original tendency to assimilate objects and events to the self, to make them part of the "me." We may even admit that the "me" cannot exist without the "mine." The self gets solidity and form through an appropriation of things which identifies them as "mine." We call myself I own therefore I am" (p. 116).

Behind the desire to control and master the objects in a collection (Belk, et al. 1988; Bryant 1982; Danet and Katriel 1989; Stebbins 1982), it appears that there is an intention to build, restore, or alter the extended self (Wexander 1979; Belk 1982; Danet and Katriel 1986; Moulin 1967/1987; Stillinger 1980). For this reason, as noted earlier, collections are almost always individual possessions rather than group or family possessions, at least within the hedonistic and individualistic ethic of modern culture (Campbell 1987). The tendency to connect the collection to other times, places, or people is also due to the individual's identification with oneself through the collection. Moulin (1967/1987) found that such an outlook was much in evidence among French collectors:

Ultimately they identify with what they own, with the collection they have "created," which gives them a sense of accomplishment.... for collectors the attitude is, "I am my paintings." Identification with the paintings gives them a positive sense of themselves (p. 83).

We found this attitude expressed at a comic book show where visitors could bring their comic books to be appraised. The collector set up displays and sales booths. The hesitant and reluctant approach that the visitors made as they neared these displays reflected their fear of a negative judgment upon *them* if the comics turned out to be worthless or of minor significance. The dejection when such a judgment was received may not be so much a disappointment at the collection's lack of financial value as a feeling of loss-of-self. But perhaps the most telling signal that collections are seen as extensions of self involves the reaction to the loss of collections. One man (WM 40) who lost his lifelong collections of phonograph records and books in a flood felt a profound sinking feeling that now his life was a failure rather than a positive contribution to the world.

Sense of self is also involved in the goal of the collector to complete the collection, for to complete the collection is to complete the self (Belk 1988, Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1982). While this tendency may be stronger among type A collectors even those employing purely aesthetic criteria are interested in having a balanced or aesthetically pleasing whole possessing parallel traits (Storr 1983). At the same time that collectors strive to complete their collections, there is a fear of completion; for if a collector is through with a collection, who is he or she then? A finished collection, like a life, has a death. Collectors can calm this fear of completion by upgrading the standards for the collection, branching out into new areas, or starting entirely new types of collections. These strategies show too that the collector's joy lies in the process of collecting rather than the outcome, reflecting a focus on what Maslow (1968) termed being needs. Collecting in multiple categories is a strategy to forestall completion. Thus, one of our informants (WM 40) collected stamps, coins, baseball cards, football jerseys, shirts, jerseys and hats, vintage cars, big band 78 rpm records, and antique furniture. A husband and wife (WF 65, W 65, M 65): dolls, saltcellars, purses, glassware, plates, jewelry, spoons, watches, several types of figurines, and antique furniture. For collectors are extreme examples of maintaining multiple collections, the tendency eventually to begin a collection in a new area among collectors. Along with the other strategies noted, multiple collections can indefinitely preclude a shift to a new area or the completion of a collection.

Temporal Aspects of Collecting

Over the life of a collector and a collection, consistent patterns tend to emerge. These patterns involve the birth, growth, and mortality of the collection. While collections can be of diverse types, they tend to follow a similar life cycle.

Collections Seldom Begin Purposefully. Ironically, in light of the seriousness and purposefulness that the collector brings to the collection is seldom preplanned. The collector rarely consciously ponders what to collect or whether to collect. The elephant mentioned previously, began when he received an elephant figurine as a wedding gift. In fact, gifts often act as the nucleus around which a collection eventually forms. Alternatively, a collector may purchase an interesting curio, perhaps on a vacation, and pursue the interest it stimulates. It may take the acquisition of several items before the collector sees the pattern and begins to say "I collect ____." Once this occurs, others may begin to give the collector gifts of items for the collection, thus reinforcing this self-definition. In order to be regarded as a true collector, however, the owner must also actively participate in the acquisition of objects for the collection.

Olmsted (1988a) asked the owner of a used marine supply store if he was a collector:

If you had asked that two months ago, I would have answered no, I am a dealer. When I buy for the store I often buy knives. When I get a real nice one I throw it in a drawer in my bedroom dresser. One day a customer asked me when I would bring those knives to the store. I said there was only a few, I probably would never. She said "I counted them last night. There are 75 pocket knives in that drawer." They still aren't in the store. I guess I am a collector now (p. 3).

Connell's (1974) *The Connoisseur* tells a similar story of a man slowly but inexorably drawn into avid collecting. He finds an interesting piece of pottery at a curio shop in the American Southwest while there for a professional convention. He takes it to a university anthropology department before leaving town to inquire if it might be a genuine Mayan piece. Learning to acquire several books about such pieces to read on the plane on the way home. Over the next several months he is drawn in by the remarkable collection of a former stranger who now welcomes him as a fellow collector and, later, through a forgery he buys at an auction and through the ministrations of several dealers. He eventually becomes so immersed in pottery that he woefully neglects his family. Although collecting does not inevitably become destructive, it does come through incidental purchases, finds, or gifts.

Tendency Toward Specialization. Like *Vie Connoisseur*, the collector almost always begins to concentrate on one area rather than a broader area of collecting. For instance one purse collector (WF 65) looks for French beaded purses, sterling silver purses, "miser's purses". The primary reason for such specialization is to set challenges that offer a realistic chance of success (superiority over other collectors). Just as academics within any field tend to specialize in only a few topics within their field, do collectors. In this way, they greatly enhance their chances of becoming authorities and having superior collections. One that was not in fashion among the Renaissance collectors who assembled wunderkammern. Contemporary

encountered include a man who only wanted Mickey Mouse Replicas from the 1950s, a woman who only collect Eastern U.S. (with indentations for 5 rather than 6 oysters), and a man who collects only Model A Ford Roadster found that stamp collectors were most likely to switch from collecting stamps of the world to collecting only a few issues, and Stenross (1987) found that gun collectors are likely to specialize by time period, country of production

Unlike the decision to start collecting, the decision to specialize in a particular subarea is made more deliberately. One collector interviewed decided to specialize in netsukes and Japanese block prints, partly because he spent time in Japan and lived there for three years as an attorney. A collector of British Army ceramic medals was pursuing the grail of a medal ("like the one Winston Churchill was buried with"). And a comic book collector was concentrating on issue number 20, when a writer he admires took over the scripts. In each of these cases of specialization, there was a rationale than had been formulated to explain the initial interest in the general area of the collection. At a more structural level, undoubtedly structural variables such as family background and education also play a role in such choices (cf., I think, the incidental start of collections cuts across these structural variables.

Collection as Cumulative Experience. A collected object becomes a reminder of the story of its acquisition. The collector is recalling and retelling this story (e.g., Benjamin 1955). The images that a collection conjures up may therefore be a part of the collector's personal history of times and places. Stewart (1984, p. 151) calls these associations "souvenirs" (because of their connection with the past) and distinguishes them from collections (which she contends involve only a metaphoric derivation of a collection). However, we consider personal history to be an inescapable part of collections. "it is as if," says Abbas (1988), "that a collection could be transformed into the possession of experience" (p. 230).

A collection, therefore, is more than just a small museum of the objects collected. It is also the major museum of the collector. The term "museum" is literally appropriate for more than half a dozen of our informants who have taken their collections into public museums during their lifetimes. Another several dozen informants have had their collections temporarily on public exhibitions open to the public or have opened their homes to interested viewers at certain times of the year. And several collectors have received mass media attention to their collections. In each case, we find that these collectors share a particular proof of a life well-spent. Since those who patronize these displays are self-selected and generally find the collector's feelings of accomplishment tend to be reinforced by the comments of these visitors. While some people write autobiographies or consolidate their life experiences into photograph albums, for the collector, the collection is a reified experience and the demonstration of an accomplishment. It is a monument to the self.

The Quest for Immortality. If the collection is an autobiography and a monument, it is not surprising that collectors worry about the fate that will befall their collections after they die. As Rigby and Rigby (1944) observe:

because the collector has identified his creation so closely with himself (a very strengthening bond between men), he sometimes feels that, like a strong boat, it will bear him through the centuries after his body has returned to the earth again (p. 47).

It is not necessarily the case that the collector wants the collection to perpetuate his or her identity-, there may be a desire for the immortality of the collection itself. The feeling is often one of seeking a way that the entity of the collection can be passed on to a caring heir is sought who will appreciate the collection.

Because suitable heirs in the immediate family are often hard to find (for reasons we shall later explore), an heir is often sought among grandchildren. Thus, the elephant replica collector hopes his two-year-old granddaughter will take over his collection by reading her elephant stories and giving her elephant gifts. A baseball-card collector had already willed his collection to his grandson. A stamp collector is giving his grandchildren stamp books in hopes that one will "get the bug" and take over the collection.

Another way in which collectors attempt to gain immortality is by convincing a museum to preserve their collection. One collector of Duveen's sales to wealthy collectors, "he was selling immortality. Since most of his proteges were aging men, the collector's yearn for immortality was not hard" (p. 102). Their immortality was assured by buying high-quality pieces that museums would accept. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult as the prices of fine art skyrocket and museums increasingly restrict their flexibility in the future. When no heir and no museum acceptance is likely for the collection, the collector can

collection will go to "a good home." As Lord Kenyon contemplated the fate of his autograph collection, he reflected

No one will ever be as fond of my pets as I have been.... I look upon them almost as one might upon children whom he must leave behind.... None the less dear to me are these relics of the leaders of literature. Some one will preserve them, and perhaps fondle them as I have done. I trust that they will be under the protecting care of a true collector, a real antiquary -- no mere bargain-hunter, no 'snapper' of unconsidered trifles, but one endowed with the capacity to appreciate whatsoever things are worthy of the affection of the lover of letters and of history (Joline 1902, pp. 306-307).

In more contemporary times, another way for a collector to achieve immortality is to have their collection featured in *Architectural Digest* or *Connoisseur*. For example, a *Connoisseur* article featuring the collections of His Serene Highness Prince von Thurn und Taxis, quotes the self-congratulatory Prince as saying "I especially love the jewels of Marie Antoinette, 300 of which are prize pieces," "I can't begin to figure out how much we've got," and "What I have would fill the Louvre" (Dradgadze 1988). The title of another article laments, "The Warhol Collection: Why Selling it is a Shame" (Kaylar 1988). The cycle of the collector is completed: from a typically accidental start, through specialization and the accumulation of objects, the collector hopes that the collector or at least the collection will achieve some measure of immortality.

IS COLLECTING DESIRABLE?

Collectors and Collections

A critical question about collecting concerns its desirability. While we have noted that collecting is generally a socially sanctioned activity, its acquisitiveness and possessiveness, we have not considered what beneficial and harmful effects collecting has on the individual and the society which sanctions it. We will first consider positive and negative aspects of collecting for the individual and the implications of collecting at the societal level.

Olmsted (1988a) contends that collecting is a form of deviance that largely escapes criticism because it is more prevalent among the upper than the lower classes of society. Nevertheless, most fictional portrayals of collecting depict collectors in negative terms, as pathological, that suggest opprobrium (e.g., Balzac 1848/1968; Chatwin 1989; Connell 1974; Dreiser 1925; Flaubert 1857/1967; Galsworthy 1906/1967; Williams 1945/1984). Based on our interviews with collectors, we detect both positive and negative aspects of collecting.

Positive Aspects for the Individual

Collecting and Meaning. While we have thus far presented collecting primarily as a consumption activity, it is also a form of production. The production of a collection is a creative act that brings something new into existence: the particular things selectively assembled. Depending on the type of collection and collector, the result of this activity is the production of knowledge and/or beauty. From the perspective of the collector, these productions may be experienced as enlightenment, learning, aesthetic joy, or feelings of mastery, meaningfulness, and accomplishment (Torgovnick 1988). Collecting (especially in an achievement-oriented society -- McClelland 1971) may provide a purpose in life and a sense of accomplishment when the collector is employed, exceeds that present on the job (Ackerman 1990). On a less grand scale, collecting provides meaning for some collectors say, "It keeps me busy" (Soroka 1988; Travis 1988).

In addition to creativity, a second source of meaning derived from collecting is that it can be a form of play. It can be a joyful releasing play, or passionate escapist play. In the latter cases, especially, collecting may provide sources of meaning not available in the workplace, where play is often frowned upon. It may offer the adult a chance to engage in a game that would otherwise be disparaged as childish and miniature. Given the presumed human need for play, this opportunity is significant.

There is nothing rational about collecting, but this personal expression is reassuring -- it shows that there is still among us, in this doggedly materialistic society, many poets and dreamers, prepared to indulge in their collecting fantasies (Caxton Publishing 1974, p. 185).

As with games and many other forms of play, collecting is a structured rule-governed activity. There are rules to

area, and participation in these shared rules helps the collector feel justified, secure, and appropriate in the pursuit of his or her hobby. One's ability to follow rules provides an all-important sense of mastery or competence (White 1959). This play-rehearsal hinges on the ability to achieve closure or order and serves as one key source of motivation for collecting behavior.

Thus, a third source of meaning in collecting involves wresting personalized control from an alienated marketplace. Residents in a council housing estate have created inalienable culture from alienable goods through the personalization of their rented kitchens:

the collector is engaged exactly in a struggle against universal commodification. His possession of things of their commodity character (p. 2/20).

By reassembling the things of the world in a newly meaningful way, the collector decommoditizes and sacralizes in a manner that can transcend the standard package of commodities in a consumer culture.

Finally, a fourth source of meaning in collecting concerns the extent to which collections permit their owners to express their uniqueness. Fromkin and Snyder (1980; Snyder and Fromkin 1980) have documented the American need for uniqueness to provide a basis for identity formation (Erikson 1959) for many collectors, allowing them to feel more fully individual and different from others. The collection is tangible evidence that the collector is unique (Mine 1988). This is because a collection tends to be unique, the one-of-a-kind creation of its owner. Thus, collections confer a heightened sense of specialness upon those who possess them. Along these lines, Rigby and Rigby (1944) repeat the collecting story of a man who pays a fortune for the only known duplicate of a rare book in his collection and then triumphantly throws it into the sea for the satisfaction of owning the only extant copy.

Collecting Creates Comrades and Sustains Social Ties. A second set of individual benefits that may result from collecting is the creation and maintenance of a social network comprised of fellow collectors as well as dealers and other experts. Just as a sports team may bring together disparate fans in a common cause, so does collecting. Personal friendships may be formed between more avid collectors who regularly attend auctions, shows, club meetings, and other gatherings. In fact, one large study of collectors attending an auction found that friendship was the primary reason given for collecting (Soroka 1988). Although it is the rule, we find that sometimes those brought together through collecting are members of the same family -- brothers and sisters with parents. When this is the case, collecting not only creates new social networks but integrates existing ones (Owen 1987).

A collection may also serve to connect the collector to others by potentiating more appropriate gift-giving, since it can help to identify the collector's interests (Gotelli 1988). However, as noted previously, such gifts are often perceived by collectors as less valuable than the joys of participating in the process of search and the application of personal taste and knowledge.

Collecting may also be an attempt to fill the void left by the loss of loved ones. Freud was not the only collector who collected after the death of a same-sex parent. We have found this among several other collectors as well. "Empty nest" households may experience an increase in collecting activity (Christ 1965). In such cases it appears that the objects collected may be acting as a surrogate for the collector. Emic references to these objects as part of the family are not uncommon among our informants. In this sense, objects are sometimes be regarded as part of the family, so may the objects collected (Baekeland 1981) -- with pets themselves being a common example of such collections. Freud's good morning greeting to a Chinese statue is one example of this personification and a common theme in collecting.

Collecting Captures Cherished Memories. Besides its role in social bonding, collecting may permit an individual to preserve certain cherished memories of past experiences and precious human relationships with people and places which would otherwise be lost space, if they remain at all. In some cases, this sort of nostalgic meaning may help to compensate to some extent for the loss of a loved one or partially to assuage an otherwise unbearable sorrow. Certainly, family photo albums play this role for many of our informants.

A touching evocation of this aspect of collecting appears in the recent movie written by Stu Silver (1987) called "The Train," in which Owen (Danny DeVito) tries to persuade Larry (Billy Crystal) to murder his unbearably harridan wife. The resulting black comedy (heavy with satiric overtones that parody Hitchcock's "Strangers on a Train") eventually takes place in Owen's house, where he meets the shrew herself and where Owen shows Larry his prized collection of coins.

Owen: You want to see my coin collection?

Larry: No!

O: I collect coins. I got a dandy collection.

L: I don't want to see it. Owen.

O: But it's my *collection*.

L: I don't care. Look. Owen; I'm just not in the mood. OK?

O: [Removing a box from under the floor boards, lying on his belly like a small child at play, and then extracting the coins from their envelopes] I never showed it to anyone before.

L: [Impatiently] All right, I'll look at it.

O: No. it's OK

L: Show me the collection.

O: No, you don't mean it.

L: [With exasperation] Show me the damned *coins!*

O: [Happily] All right. This is a nickel. And this one, *also, is* a nickel. And here's a quarter. And *another* quarter. And a penny. See? Nickel, nickel, quarter, quarter, penny.... And *here is* another nickel.

L: [Bewildered] Why do you *have* them?

O: What do you mean?

L: Well, the purpose of a coin collection is that the coins are worth something, Owen.

O: Oh, but they *are*. This one, here, I got in change when my Dad took me to see Peter, Paul, and Mary. And this one I got in change when I bought a hot dog at the Circus. My Daddy let me keep the change. Uh, this one is my favorite. This is Martin and Lewis at the Hollywood Palms. See the way it shines, that little eagle? I loved my Dad a lot.

L: [Realizing ...] I So this whole collection is, uh ?

O: Change my Daddy let me keep.

L: [Tenderly] What was his name?

O: Ned. He used to call me his "Little Ned." That's why Momma named me "Owen." I really miss him.

L: [Gently] That's a real nice collection, Owen.

O: Thank you, Larry.

The economy with which the creators of "Throw Mama from the Train" have evoked the collecting spirit in this masterpiece of compactness. The relevant moral is articulated by Larry: "The purpose of a coin collection is that the coins are worth something.... That's a real nice collection. Owen." In sum, the point that should not be missed -- in the present context with Larry and Owen -- is that collections are one type of consumption that can draw forth powerful feelings of (in this case, loving memory of a lost father). Collecting is a consumption experience that engenders and reflects deep meanings in people's lives.

Collecting *Evokes Deep* Emotional Involvement. As this episode from the movie clearly illustrates, collections tend to be vehicles for arousing, expressing, and even embodying powerful emotions and deep involvement. Danet and Katriel (1990) note that "collectors of all ages share [this intense emotional involvement]" (p. 1). Bloch and his colleagues have written in detail about these phenomena, which they call "product" as opposed to "purchase" involvement:

enduring involvement with a product derives from the product's relatedness to a consumer's need for self-concept.... At very high levels, enduring involvement may be termed product enthusiasm and is characteristic of product enthusiasts such as car buffs, wine connoisseurs, or avid video gamers. Product enthusiasm entails a strong, abiding, hobby-like interest in the product class in question which transcends the temporary purchase process arousal investigated in most involvement research (Bloch and Bruhn 1982).

The transcendent qualities of collecting have been characterized earlier in this chapter as magical or sacred. When we reach the highest level, the accompanying emotion is that of ecstasy. We count this kind of emotional commitment as a strength to encourage and to channel the expression of undeniably powerful feelings that touch the core of the human condition.

Negative Aspects for the Individual

The advantages just discussed all serve to encourage people to participate in collecting. However, collecting also has disadvantages. Interestingly, many of these are closely connected to the advantages. That is, the same phenomena that produce positive consequences for the collector can also produce negative consequences in people's lives. Although collecting provides a means of self-expression and personal development, it may simultaneously limit identity development to one arena. That is, it may encourage depth at the expense of breadth. While collecting provides tangible social expression of a facet of the self, it often houses that identity in tangible objects that can be lost or destroyed. In tangibilizing the self, the collector runs the risk that this tangible evidence will be destroyed (Jonker 1982). While one may welcome others' collections because they provide a ready guideline for deciding what to give, this encourages a dependency of the collector by these givers. They may see the collector in terms of what he or she has, rather than who he or she is. Collecting commoditizes the identity of the collector, and denies him or her the pleasures associated with hunting for appropriate objects. Collecting misunderstands the pleasure of collecting as resulting from having rather than doing.

In focusing talents and energies on the collection, the collector restricts his or her range of experience and the people he or she interacts with. For many, collecting means lessened contact with other people because increasingly the focus of attention is on the objects of the collection (Travis 1988). Collecting for such people begins to reflect an obsessive interest in perfection (Travis 1982). Focusing attention so totally on a collection may, however, be seen as trivial by others (Kanter and Reid 1988). Collecting as a fantasy enactment can illuminate the disappointing ways that reality fails to match fantasies. And in the hunt for objects, limited funds may result in a feeling of frustration and incompetence.

Addictive Aspects of Collecting. In examining literary and social science treatments of collecting, and in reviewing the phenomena captured in our fieldnotes, it is apparent that collecting is a highly cathected activity for many consumers. Some view it as a disease. It is frequently described as a pleasurable activity that can have some unpleasant consequences. In its extreme, collecting embodies the characteristics of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and reported by Belk, Washburn, and Asch (1983). Flow is an optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988) that is psychologically integrating and socially affirming. On the other aspect, collecting is an activity over which many consumers fear losing control. In Chatwin's (1989) chilling phrase, the collector is a prisoner. Whether likened to idolatry or illness, collectors acknowledge the very real possibility that collecting can become an addiction. Danet and Katriel (1990) suggest that the seemingly self-deprecating admission of addiction to one's collection connotes a sense of responsibility for uninhibited collecting. At the same time they recognize that "serious" collectors relish their ability to exercise control in their collecting activity. What apparently is being negotiated in the area between passion and addiction is the extent to which the collector controls or is controlled by the activity of collecting.

We use the metaphor of addiction in full awareness of the highly charged socio-clinical political arena in which it is used. As noted in the previous section, xii) notes that the idea of addiction has always expressed central cultural conceptions about motivation and behavior. It is a metaphor that is used when the focus of the addiction itself embodies such quintessentially central cultural preoccupations -- work and play, consumption, mastery and control -- as does collecting. Here the line between a prosocial, life-enhancing "positive" addiction and a more conventionally construed dysfunctional addiction is much more difficult to draw. Certainly, the tendency

state of consciousness of the kind produced by any ritual activity, whether behaviorally via collecting, or pharmacologically via drugs, is a cross-cultural universal. Some theorists have elevated (or reduced) the tendency to the level of a drive (Seigler 1988). The tendency is implemented are valued differentially across time and space. That these means are subject to abuse is not surprising. Thus, what follows is a culturally constructed account of some of the difficulties encountered by collectors who are addicted to collecting.

Although addictive collecting is not present among all collectors, there is compelling evidence of its pervasiveness among others (Rheims 1961), self-reports in surveys (Travis 1988), and the emic self-labels used by our informants (e.g., "Mickey (Mouse) fix", "print Junkie"). In the words of one of Danet and Katriel's (1990) informants, "Its a disease I'm addicted to". One informant reported that he described his collecting passion as "an addiction second in intensity only to his nicotine addiction". In pursuing this diagnosis, we must define what we mean by addiction, and how it is evidenced.

Addiction Defined. Most commonly, addiction implies a substance upon which a person is physiologically, as well as psychologically, dependent, such as alcohol or cocaine. However, according to some authors, it is possible to be addicted to behavior (Schaefer 1987). This is a non-physiological type of addiction. Although this is a position not accepted by many researchers, there is a consensus definition of addiction (cf. Jenike 1956; King 1981; Lang 1983; Marlatt, Baer, Donovan, and Kivlahan 1988; 1980; Salzman 1980; Smith 1986; Sutker and Allain 1988; Winston 1980; Yates, Leebey, and Shisslak 1983). In our study, we use a functional definition that is best formulated by Peele (1975):

An addiction exists when a person's attachment to a sensation, an object, or another person is such that his [sic] appreciation of and ability to deal with other things in his environment, or in himself, so that he becomes increasingly dependent on that experience as his only source of gratification.

Addiction to a behavior can then be assessed by looking at the consequences of attachment to this behavior as a person might be addicted to a love relationship (Peele 1975), shopping (O'Guinn and Faber 1989), television viewing (Yates, Leebey, and Shisslak 1983), eating, or dieting (Bruch 1968, Spignesi 1983). That is, even activities which are normal, healthy lifestyle for most people can become the focus of addictive tendencies for others who become dependent on them as their primary source of gratification. The question then becomes whether the clinically addictive behavior is or should be culturally labeled as an addiction (Walker and Lidz 1983).

Addictions that escape society's condemnation may be evidenced by noting the person's limited interaction with the world. Addicts exhibit an intense focus of behavior in a single direction, performing the same behavior repeatedly to fill their time. The addiction pattern in many definitions is a lack of satiety with an increasing rather than decreasing desire to engage in the behavior. In other words, addicts do not adhere to the law of diminishing marginal returns, but rather seek ritualistic and repetitive behavior for gratification (Peele 1975). The ritual provides a sameness of stimulation, rather than variety and growth. This is a human tendency to become fixated on something in a way that resists both change and growth (de Dampierre 1988).

A widespread clinical perspective on addiction places the genesis of the addictive cycle in feelings of low self-esteem. The world is unpredictable, which produces anxiety in the individual. The person attempts to control these feelings of anxiety by using the addictive pattern of behavior to block experience of the variable world. By contrast, the predictable behavior of the addiction feels comforting and reassuring. However, the addicted individual may eventually experience problems (e.g., financial) resulting from this behavior. These problems produce feelings of lower self-esteem and greater anxiety. The individual continually reverts to the addiction to block these feelings, clinicians refer to this as the addictive cycle. This cycle continues until a break. Even recovering addicts may find that a craving for the addictive substance or process can be induced visually by seeing drug paraphernalia or driving by the place where the addiction occurred (Peele 1988).

It is equally important to define what addiction is not. Addiction is not merely absorption in a behavioral process (rather than block or avoid) novelty and stimulation (de Dampierre 1987). This is often a difficult assessment for the researcher, but certainly an important one. It is also useful to note that addiction is not the same as a habit, which may be performed as part of other aspects of life. Habitual behavior patterns may help the person better cope with the rest of life, while addictive behavior cannot be labeled an addiction merely because it is time-consuming; what is crucial is whether for the

an enhanced and abiding feeling of mastery and self-esteem. Failing this, the time-consuming habit becomes a liability, ultimately, a self-defeating confinement.

There are other concepts used in the literature on addiction that are useful in understanding collecting addiction. "Substitutional addiction" is used to refer to the tendency of a person who is addicted to one substance to substitute other substances. "Cross-addiction" is used to refer to the tendency of a person who is addicted to one substance to become addicted to another. This perspective sees addiction as a pattern residing primarily in the person, not in the interpersonal environment or a particular substance. The term "co-dependency" is used to refer to the tendency for behaviors that foster the continuance of the addict's addictive cycle. That is, the structure and pattern of life in a family actually perpetuate one family member's addiction, despite the fact that the nonaddicted family members find their own anxieties about their worth and the predictability of the world, other family members may become dependent on the addicted family member's addictive behavior. The addiction allows various family members to play either the helpful care-giver, or the wronged party. Co-dependents are addicted to someone else's being the one with "the addiction." The continuance of the addiction enables other family members to continue relationship patterns to which they have become accustomed, allowing them to remain the same rather than challenging them to change. With these definitions and terminology, we can begin to assess the addictive patterns of behavior present in collecting.

Addiction in Collecting. Although almost any behavior can become addictive, the pattern of behavior characteristic of collecting is especially prone to addiction. Most collectors interviewed mentioned the search for additions to a collection as the primary aspect of collecting behavior. Rather than spend time examining or organizing items that are already in the collection, collectors go to the store or shop for additions to the collection. Search behavior may be compulsively and ritualistically enacted (cf., Reid 1987). Possession provides the temporary fix for the addict. A sense of longing and desire (Johnson 1983; Campbell 1987) that is missing in life -- is temporarily met by adding to the collection. But this is a temporary fix, a staving off of withdrawal symptoms of emptiness and anxiety that is addressed by searching for more. Shopping and searching are the ritualized means by which the collector obtains a sense of competence and mastery in life. These activities are the bittersweet consequences of experiencing addiction in the marketplace.

Emic descriptions of shopping for additions to a collection highlight this ritual aspect of search behavior. It is part of a larger ritual that carries with it particular liturgical rules concerning appropriate sequence. For example, one Barbie doll collector spent considerable time at doll shows explained particular rules that guided his doll buying pattern, such as having the doll "checked out" and then redress the doll to allow him to see if any part of the body is damaged. Only when carried out in this ritualized manner is the search "right". Objects found in the search-are often seen as having irresistible power over the person, as with a collector (Kisly 1987, p. 45) who recounted, "I just had to have it. It had to be mine."

By placing the source of such power outside of themselves, addicts reinforce their belief that it is impossible for them to control the collection (Sandor 1987). They are possessed by the collection as much as they possess it. Through believing that this mystical power is outside of themselves they begin to construct a first-order lie -- a lie to the self -- that negates the possibility of taking control of the addiction (Schaefer 1987).

But searching for additions to a collection, although of central importance, is not the only addictive focus for collectors. Attention to and control over the objects in the collection provides an additional source of feelings of control and mastery (Kisly 1988, 1990) -important feelings to an addict (Kisly 1987). For example, one interpretation of the propensity of collectors to donate to museums is that, by doing so, they retain a certain sense of control of the collection by insuring their objects in the hands of another collector (Rheims 1961).

Collecting activity allows a collector to avoid other aspects of life. It is a form of withdrawal from other aspects of life that is often positively sanctioned, as evidenced by media attention featuring collectors as heroes. Rather than widening the social distance, it narrows and deepens it (Kisly 1987). This is an observation that many collectors object to; they counter that through collecting they have met many interesting people and have learned many things. For some, this may be correct, but for others it may be a first-order lie to themselves, as is commonly noted among addicts (Schaefer 1987). On the whole, collecting for an addict, involves the individual in a repetitive, predictable pattern of behavior which can provide a form of solace and control for the individual troubled by living in an unpredictable world. This is acknowledged indirectly by the more than 2/3 of a sample of

that the label of addict was appropriate to describe their involvement in collecting (Travis 1988).

Some collectors exhibit cross-addictions to other substances and processes. Several informants are especially notable. One couple (WM 65/WF 65) is so addicted to collecting that they collect flow blue plates, beaded purses, silver spoon and crystal, first-day-of-issue Franklin Mint coins, stamps, deer replicas, Cupid Awake and Cupid Asleep picture glasses, leather bound books by James Whitcomb Riley, numerous kinds of figurines of women, and perfume bottles in their collections. Another man (WM 45), a collector of Mickey Mouse memorabilia, had previously been addicted to alcohol. He quit both of these substance addictions, but admitted that he later became psychologically addicted to collecting. Cross-addictions to other behaviors as well as other substances are evident in some people who are addicted to collecting.

A phenomenon of considerable interest in the mental health literature in the last few years has been the recognition that people may often manifest addictions of their own as adults. Having grown up in families where co-dependency on the part of a family member was present, they may later in life become the addict in their own families. We often found inter-generational patterns of collecting, both downward and upward-- (Soroka 1988) of collecting, but generally in a different specialty area. The son (WM 35) of a doll collector grew up to become a Barbie doll collector. The collectors of multiple types of items mentioned previously include a woman who collects open salt dishes, and began to work with a granddaughter on a stamp collection. A father who collects baseball cards is teaching his children some important values by helping them become baseball card collectors. He believes that his daughter learns to take care of things. He credits his own maternal grandfather with instilling certain values in the games they watched together -- standing in the living room with their hands over their hearts when the national anthem is played at the beginning of the games. We also found evidence of a complex web of addictive co-dependency among family members who are addicted themselves. Collecting, while probably due more to social enculturation (nurture) than to genetic determination, appears to run in families (Olmstead 1988; Rheims 1961).

But unlike most other areas where addictions are formed, collecting is culturally sanctioned, rather than disapproved of as a character flaw. Collecting represents immersion in acquisitiveness, individualism, competitiveness, and display of status through material objects -- all central values in American culture. By contrast, collecting does not represent asceticism, cooperation, or introspective learning and spiritual growth. Instead the collector says, through the collection, "I don't." Rather than being viewed as unhealthy, addiction to collecting is regarded positively in our consumer culture as an achievement to be admired (cf., Owen 1988). In its core assumption of exclusive possession, collecting celebrates individual achievement as a societal value. Further tribute is paid to this addiction by the enshrinement (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) of collections in museums which often devote as much attention to the collectors as to the artists or creators of the collected item (Berger 1980). Museums are the "churches of collectors" (Rheims 1961), implying the utmost regard given to this activity in contemporary culture. Our field data on collecting support the notion that contemporary U.S. culture is an Addictive System (Schaefer 1991) and that individual addictions to collecting behavior.

Rivalry with Spouses and Children. While collections can sometimes create surrogate companionship through anthropomorphism, this same tendency can also alienate living members of the family. We were at first perplexed when children and spouses to deny the collector's fervent wish that they adopt and care for the collection when the collector dies. The explanation for this puzzle, we believe, is that the collection is regarded by these children and spouses as a rival for a considerable portion of their loved one's time and attention and therefore is now resented for having alienated them. It has become an enemy -- a target for derogation rather than an object of reverence.

Here, it is instructive to further consider Sigmund Freud's collection. Two dominant themes in the collection, narcissism and death (Ransohoff 1975; Spector 1975). We have previously noted Freud's tendency to fondle objects from his collection and his observation that collecting represents a libidinal transference. He also expressed a wish to be buried with his ashes were accordingly interred in one of his Egyptian urns (Spector 1975). But it is the sexual theme in collecting that is most revealing. Potential rivals for a loved one's affections. Thus, Olmsted (1988a) suggests that collections may be an increasing phenomenon. Baekeland (1981) notes of his art-collector patients:

To a man, they report that they usually know immediately whether or not a piece really appeals to them, and whether they want to possess it. They often compare their feeling of longing for it to sexual desire. This suggests that art objects are confused in the unconscious with ordinary sexual objects, an idea that

confirmation from the fact that many collectors like to fondle or stroke the objects they own or touch over and over from every angle.... The only other context in which looking, fondling and caressing is so large is sexual foreplay (p. 51).

In this connection, we are reminded that Freud (who so easily saw beneath the surface of things) was either unaware of his own theoretical perspectives on sex, death, and anal retentiveness to collecting activity in general or to his own family (Fenichel 1954; Merminger 1942).

Post-Mortem Distribution Problems. As noted in the preceding section, one major problem in bequeathing collections is the distribution of the collection (McCracken 1988a). While commercial dealers and museums compete with each other and with individual heirs for the collection, the growth for some collectibles (Nason 1987), there is often no accounting for any one particular collector's taste. Value to the avid collector is often unimportant to most others. Other problems are created in alternative forms of distribution. If the collection represents the distilled effort of the collector, they may also come to represent the distilled essence of the collector's life; therefore feel ambivalent about possessing, selling, or, worse, junking the collection. In anticipation of this problem, collectors make arrangements for the disposition of their collections or even to dispose of them themselves in preparation for death. In some instances, collectors want their collections buried with them or destroyed at their deaths (Baekeland 1981; Rigby 1981). Ironically, toward the end of the collector's life the collection can shift from being a source of great satisfaction to a problem.

Sociocultural Importance of Collecting

Apart from individual benefits and problems of collecting, why do contemporary western societies seem to appreciate the benefits and problems does collecting create at a societal level? Clearly, collecting creates problems to the extent that it turns love, and money into activities not generally considered to be productive. Similarly, the collecting passion has occasioned pillage, murder, colonialistic exploitation of Third World cultures, and in some cases, the wholesale destruction of cultures (Chase, Chase, and Topsey 1988; Clifford 1988; Cole 1985, Nichols, Klesert, and Anyon 1989). To the extent that the collector's rival for the collector's affections, it weakens the family as a social institution. Unless Olmsted (1988a) is correct, collecting is sanctioned because it is more prevalent among the upper than the lower classes, for societies to tolerate and generate it there must be some benefits to counter these formidable problems which threaten the social order.

A material argument, often given by collectors themselves, is that the artistic and scientific legacy of collections is passed on to generations. However, this argument seems to be more of a rationalization than an explanation for the societal problems, particularly in light of the content of many collections (e.g., beer cans, Franklin Mint figurines, elephant replicas) and the disposition mentioned earlier. One alternative reason that the possessiveness involved in collecting may be sanctioned is that ownership, ownership of an extensive collection may create responsible law-abiding citizens with a stake in the social community. Competitive rivalry between collectors, like many sports competitions, also serves as a channeled and visible reinforcement of what remains of the Protestant work ethic. Even though the achievement does little to inhibit the intense individualistic competition engendered by collecting symbolically endorses the social Darwinism of competition that stabilize and solidify class boundaries by allowing successful competition within narrow collecting categories that only those who have the money, support, and knowledge to pursue. In this way, competition is deflected laterally rather than vertically. Further, the acquisitiveness involved in collecting both symbolically and materially supports a profit-based capitalism that escalates consumer desires. In fact, collecting epitomizes and reifies consumer desire for ever more and better things. As consumers learn to enact the economic myth of insatiable needs, collectors learn to push the horizons and boundaries past the possibility of completion. Collecting codifies the current credo that the one who dies with most toys wins. However, this is usually modified to "most and best." Increasingly, selectivity based either on symbolic or exchange value, quantity, may be the guiding principle behind contemporary collecting (Landis 1990a). Whether this potentially contradicts the otherwise democratic trend in remains to be seen.

Thus, although collecting creates some social problems, it also enacts the values that provide impetus and momentum. Appetitive behaviors such as collecting are the constituting essence of consumer culture and of the identities for which it is at once the process by which such a culture evolves and the diagnostic product of the culture itself. It permits a "proper" (that is, "rule-governed") relation of people with objects and a "deviant" (whether "idolatry" or "erotic")

(Clifford 1988, p. 219). Whether it aspires to aesthetic redemption (Clifford 1988) or decays to personal fetishism shapes and reflects the identity of the culture and the individual. In McCracken's (1988b, p. 133) view, collecting is a search for meaning: the elusive nature of collectibles allows collectors to invest them with idealized values realizable in the vehicle by which authentic experience is sought. The nature of authenticity is negotiated through collection.

Authenticity may take a number of forms. Collectors may harness and tame the cultural imperatives of acquisition by canalizing these forces in a way that minimizes the social consequences of their abuse and maximizes the individual's gain and mastery. Here, both society and individuality are affirmed; desire is transmuted to everyone's gain. To the extent encouraged by collection, authenticity assumes the form of a selectively recollected and reconstituted past. For nostalgia, collecting may be both a vehicle of alienation and salvation from contemporary culture. Whether such authenticity is "false" or "expanded", the collector is able to access a cultural vision that is personally meaningful. At any rate, the celebration of authentic U.S. experience -- the probing of the tension between work and play, production and consumption, order and disorder, spurious and genuine -- is a principal sociocultural function of collecting.

As a reaction against cultural imperatives, authentic experience may be intimately entwined with counterculture and the recontextualizing of a stigmatized past, which may provoke a number of ethical concerns. Collectors of such objects (Krieger 1990b) as Nazi war memorabilia or racist black Americana on the order of Little Black Sambo cookie jars preserved could be rekindled as easily as reviled. When blacks collect these racist memorabilia, the intent is either to preclude racism (as with Jewish preservation of the memory of the Holocaust), or to appropriate these symbols and thereby gain power through another sort of recontextualization (Adler 1988).

Collecting resists the forces of homogenization in a commoditized world. Stewart (1984) regards collecting as a search for use-value. Pushed to the limits of commodity fetishism, collecting is the eroticization of use-value. It is a way of reanimating our relationship with objects. It is a form of play that may permit a relearning or realigning of priorities.

CONCLUSION

If collecting began in prehistory, it shows no signs of abating in our hyperindustrial post-modern era. If a certain amount of leisure is necessary to support the non-utilitarian use of things in collections, then only severe economic hardship or a significant change in consumer culture could curtail collecting. Short term hardships, such as changes in laws eliminating tax breaks for collectors, may actually accelerate the pace of collecting, as collectors auction their wares, and as museums sell portions of their new acquisitions (Stout, 1990). Collecting is a paramount feature of consumer behavior that deserves far more attention. Quite conceivably, the study of collecting could become the cornerstone upon which an ecology of artifacts (Krieger) and an understanding of the nature of contemporary consumer culture, is ultimately founded. The mythology governing collecting is a microcosm in the collector's world. Collecting represents acquisitiveness and possessiveness, freed from linguistic constraints with a noble sense of purpose and destiny. The rhetoric that collectors use to describe the development of their collections is not that used by religious converts to describe their calls to serve God. In the case of collecting, however, the god is materialism -- a pure unadulterated fascination with getting and keeping things -- even when these things are intangible experiential memories. The process of collecting is legitimized and institutionalized through the fellowship of other collectors, organizations, public institutions, and dealers. This same community helps sacralize certain consumer objects through their use and reverence.

The fusion and cathexis of work, play, and love that collecting represents often occurs in the service of self-enrichment that consumer researchers have only recently begun to investigate. Collecting is a culturally sanctioned, anxiety-reducing activity that gives one's self with a gift (Mick and DeMoss 1990, Sherry and McGrath 1989). Freud was aware of his own penchant for collecting; an excerpt from a letter to a colleague suggests (Dudar 1990, p. 103):

I got myself an expensive present today, a lovely little dipylon vase -- a real gem -- to fight my ill health.
(Spending money is indicated not only for states of fear.)

The nature of collecting as a gift to the self merits investigation in its own right. It may be one of the only forms of consumption that resolves the demands of conflicting ideologies in a culture of consumption, because it seems to many to serve a

forms of consumption. It may be one of the few sacralization rituals that hallows the individual and ennobles society. Consequently, collecting manifests itself as an elegant way to serve beauty and utility, self and others. Through the self is developed over time, and cultural values are affirmed in the bargain. In this sense, goods are truly good (Isherwood 1979). While Freud, as many of us, may have had little to say in public about the personal significance of his harnessing of the discordant forces of his episteme and sublimation of them in both philosophy and practice we can see in his collecting.

The history of collecting, its contemporary institutional aspects, and the societal functions served by collecting in different economies help explain the singular importance of collecting in contemporary consumer culture. For these reasons, not only to study the distilled essence of consumption, it is also to study the course of the modern consumption experience. The intense focus of energies that collecting brings forth in the collector, these are important reasons to make collecting a consumer research agenda.

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