
Of mice and men: gender identity in collecting

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IS COLLECTING A GENDERED ACTIVITY?

The general thesis we wish to explore is that gender is expressed, shaped and marked through the process of collecting. We define collecting as the activity of selectively acquiring an interrelated set of objects, ideas or experiences.¹ Furthermore, in assembling these objects, ideas or experiences into a collection, the collector grants them non-utilitarian sacred status. Sacredness, in a Durkheimian or Eliadian sense, implies, in part, that the object is taken out of use.² Thus, stamps or coins in a collection are not regarded as appropriate for mailing a letter or making purchases. The objects in a collection are instead deemed sufficiently significant that they are removed from the ordinary and treated as extraordinary.

As with religious zealotry,³ we also find that collecting often involves obsessive and compulsive behaviours on the part of collectors. Even if it is not the result of a compulsion, a collection is closely linked to the collector's identity; someone cannot excuse a collection by saying, 'Well, I just happened to pick that up somewhere', or 'someone gave that to me'. Because a collection results from purposeful acquisition and retention, it announces identity traits with far greater clarity and certainty than the many other objects owned. Collections are especially instrumental to identity among avid collectors.

Some of the identity work that goes on through collections involves striving for personal completion and perfection. Completing the collection, in a sense, completes the individual; the person who has a whole collection feels more like a whole person. Similarly, a representative collection confers on the collector a sense of being well-rounded. In striving for perfection in a collection, the collector also strives for an ideal self. Generally collectors try to upgrade their collections, based on a philosophy that only the best will do. If someone can bequeath a collection and if it remains intact and is identified with the collector, that collector is immortalized.

Collectors also seek acclaim through the achievement of building their collections. A collector of elephant replicas was interviewed after he opened an elephant museum to enshrine his collection. He offered the rather implausible hope that 'History will stand in awe of what I have done.' Assembling the elephants is his (hypothesized) means of achieving immortality and acclaim. Having ennobled the elephant replicas by gathering them in a collection, he has sought to legitimize the collection by establishing it as a museum. He hopes that society will appreciate his benevolence and foresight in collecting and assembling these objects.

Thus, collecting is a means of achieving and expressing identity. Gender is implicated in this process in several ways, three of which we discuss here. Gender is linked to collecting through the gendered meaning of essential collecting activities, the gender associations of the objects collected, and the gendered uses of collections.

The most basic question we address is whether the process of collecting is inherently a male or female activity. There is a small, but provocative, historic literature addressing this issue. In their important seminal book on collecting, Douglas and Elizabeth Rigby suggested in 1944 that:

grand scale collecting almost always calls for aggressive and material ambition to a degree uncharacteristic of women, aside from women's historic economic position. Those who came within hailing distance of collecting giants were women who seemed to exhibit the masculine strain of a highly developed competitiveness, although this in no way detracts from the position of women as amateurs.⁴

In a somewhat related vein, Rémy Saisselin offers reasons why historically even a woman of means might not have been perceived as a 'serious' collector:

By 1880 in France, women were perceived as mere buyers of bibelots, which they bought as they did clothing, in their daily bargain hunting. Men, of course, collected too, but their collecting was perceived as serious and creative. Women were consumers of objects; men were collectors. Women bought to decorate and for the sheer joy of buying, but men had a vision for their collections, and viewed their collections as an ensemble with a philosophy behind it.⁵

Since women are still seen in the primary role of consumers,⁶ it is worth while considering what threat women collectors pose to society and to men in particular. In addition to offering the same competition that men now face from women in the workplace, collecting may pose an additional threat because it serves as a metaphor and metonym for capital accumulation. The fear of woman as collector rather than consumer may well be because she symbolizes a threat to male control of capital and power in society.

A related opinion is offered by Brenda Danet and Tamara Katriel. Before gathering data on collecting, they speculated that:

traditionally sexist social structures force men to go out into the world and act upon it in order to make a living, while women take the more passive role of cultivating the home and family. Since collecting is a proactive form of behavior which develops a sense of mastery, it is very likely that males will, therefore, be more involved in it than females.⁷

Their subsequent research in Israel found that among adults this tends to be true, while among children, girls are somewhat *more* likely than boys to collect. Since historical data also suggest that girls are no less likely to be collectors than boys,⁸ greater age-related female attrition among collectors may result from gender-role socialization.

Based on this small amount of literature, it appears that stereotypically masculine personality traits congenial to collecting include aggressiveness, competitiveness, mastery and seriousness. On the other hand, a set of collecting-congenial personality traits stereotypically regarded as feminine in western culture includes care, creativity, nurturance and preservation. So rather than being decidedly characteristic of one gender or the other, collecting activity benefits from both sets of traits in collectors. Traits defined as masculine seem especially useful in acquiring objects for a collection, while traits defined as feminine are important in curating and maintaining the resulting collection. Thus even within stereotypical gender-role definitions, it does not appear that the activity of collecting can be regarded as inherently masculine or feminine. Instead, collecting has certain aspects that have historically been regarded as masculine and others historically regarded as feminine in our culture.

ARE THE OBJECTS COLLECTED GENDERED?

We now consider whether objects collected tend to possess either masculine or feminine meanings. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Sigmund Freud's collection of 3,000–4,000 Roman, Egyptian, Greek and Chinese antiquities contains explicitly gendered objects that relate to Freud's work on sexual symbolism. A major category in his extensive collection is phallic amulets and other phallic objects. Although it may be true that 'Sometimes a statue is just a statue',⁹ it is clear that the choice of these particular objects was not a mere coincidence. Similarly, regardless of whether guns and rifles are viewed as phallic symbols of power,¹⁰ it is clear that gun collectors are almost uniformly male.¹¹

Although not all objects are strongly gender-typed,¹² sometimes the gender of products is constructed in the design and manufacturing process, as when motor-scooters were crafted, created, advertised and sold in England as a feminine alternative to the masculine motorcycle.¹³ In other cases, the engineered gender of objects is more subtly conveyed, as with brushes and pocket-knives that are distinctively designed for males or females and stereotypically convey certain gender role characteristics.¹⁴ Thus, wrist-watches intended for women or children are typically more delicate and ornamented, but less angular than those intended for men.

It should come as no surprise that such differences are also reflected in the objects that males and females choose to collect. Historical studies of the collections of American children reflect such biases. In 1931, Witty found that girls were more likely to collect decorative objects (e.g., flowers, pictures, monograms), jewellery, personal referent objects (e.g., souvenirs, autographs, valentines), dolls and doll items, household items, school objects and games. Boys were more likely to collect animal and insect parts, saleable junk, tobacco souvenirs, objects of war, hunting or fishing, game objects (e.g., marbles, tops, kites), and miscellaneous repair and maintenance objects (e.g., nails, oilcans, padlocks).¹⁵ At approximately the same time, Durost found girls more likely to collect jewellery, beads, cloth and dance favours, while boys were more likely to collect auto licence tags, cigar tags, and birds' eggs and nests.¹⁶ And in the same time period, Whitely found that boys were almost exclusively the collectors of tyres, radio parts, screws, tools, lumber and things having to do with hunting, fighting and war, while girls were almost exclusively the collectors of dolls and doll accessories.¹⁷

Among adults, a recent article in a collecting magazine suggests that:

Traditionally male's [*sic*] have collected clocks, stamps, coins, guns, knives and other similar items associated with childhood, sports, or a profession. [Among those who collected

other items] Many kept their 'treasures' hidden in closets, under beds, or relegated to the basement or attic feeling uneasy that their adult friends might view them as foolish, extravagant, childish or even effeminate.¹⁸

In antiques collecting, one source recommends that appropriate objects for men to collect include guns, pocket-knives, artillery shells, snuffboxes, railroadiana, souvenirs of early flyers, lead soldiers, advertising trays, antique musical instruments, and chessmen.¹⁹ Whereas antiques collecting was once almost exclusively a male avocation or vocation, during the Victorian era men turned to overstuffed Victorian furniture, leaving 'spindly' antiques to women.²⁰ While Hertz suggests a similar list of antiques that are sufficiently masculine for contemporary male collectors, he also suggests the rules that,

decorative articles or those whose primary use is decorative are essentially feminine antiques; operating and functional articles are for the most part inherently masculine antiques...women are more inclined to the fragile rather than the substantial...while men lean toward more substantial materials such as iron and tin ...women usually collect with decorative values or a definite decorative purpose in mind; men, for study from a technical or historical standpoint.²¹

Clearly such rules are not universally enacted. The Winterthur Museum houses the decorative arts collection of Henry Francis du Pont. However, the perspectives exemplified in both this museum and Hertz's guidelines echo Saisselin's observations about French attitudes a century ago: men's collections are taken seriously while women's purchases are regarded as frivolous consumption.²²

While the sample of 192 collectors we have interviewed were not selected to be statistically representative of the population of collectors, some of the differences between the incidence of males and females in particular areas of collecting are strikingly clear. The categories in which there are more women than men collectors include animal replicas, housewares (dishes, silverware, utensils) and jewellery. In contrast, more men collect antiques, books, automobiles, sports-related objects, and tattoos. In order to account more deeply for these differences, it is useful to consider the contrasts evident in case studies of two collections: the Mouse Cottage and the Fire Museum.

The Mouse Cottage

Both the Mouse Cottage and the Fire Museum are collections institutionalized as museums by a wealthy retired businessman. The Fire Museum houses his own collection of fire trucks and fire-fighting equipment. He established the Mouse Cottage across town as a posthumous memorial to his former wife. It houses her collection of mouse replicas. The brochure from the Mouse Cottage invites the visitor to:

Enter the Mouse Cottage and you'll squeak with delight! Once upon a time, in the early 1920's, there was a little girl so clever and charming in character and petite in stature that her mother quite naturally called her 'mouse.' The childhood name inspired the little girl's imagination with a life long passion for collecting mice of every description.

The mice replicas are displayed in and on pseudo-antique golden oak household furniture in a home-like setting inside a high-rent industrial warehouse near an upscale, suburban shopping district. The display is cluttered, casually arrayed, and almost chaotic. It includes mice ornaments hung on a Christmas tree with the packages beneath wrapped in mouse motif paper. A miniature Christmas tree is also displayed in the home-like family setting of a mouse dollhouse. This

decor and holiday emphasis reflect the feminine character of the collection. Christmas is 'women's work', and is a family-focused activity in which men act primarily as recipients of food, gifts and affection.²³ This theme of subservience is echoed in the mice's diminutive and miniaturized nature—traits which reflect the powerlessness associated with women and children.²⁴ The museum also contains cribs and a number of motifs featuring Mickey Mouse, a character with an interesting gender history.

When Mickey Mouse was first introduced by Walt Disney, he had a deep voice and was rather rat-like in appearance—a strong male representation. However, in order to reach the popular imagination, Mickey Mouse was neutered.²⁵ His voice became higher pitched, he became clumsy around female mice, and his appearance was made puffier and more baby-like or androgynous. Mickey's sacrifice was thus to become a eunuch in order to achieve popular success. Consistent with the brochure for the Mouse Cottage, the childlike and powerless character of Mickey Mouse succeeds in his comic adventures with the wish-fulfilling guile and cleverness of a child contesting against menacing adults.

Thus in both its decor and contents, the Mouse Cottage represents that which is diminutive, homey and informal. It contrasts sharply with the Fire Museum.

The Fire Museum

The collection of Mouse's husband is housed in another museum in a larger industrial warehouse located in the same town. The Fire Museum brochure invites the visitor to:

See the world's largest exhibit of fire-fighting equipment. Over 100 fully restored pieces dating from circa 1725 to 1950.... Learn about the history of the American firefighter—America's most dangerous profession—from Ben Franklin's Philadelphia volunteers to the modern era.

The exhibit is considerably more spacious than the Mouse Cottage. The fire trucks and other pieces of fire equipment are restored to perfection, and are individually presented in spacious roped-off areas that impart importance and honour to these objects. Carefully displayed exhibits of fire hats and other fire-fighting regalia line museum walls. Historic photos, along with dates and plaques, help to give the impression that this is a historical museum. Whereas the Mouse Cottage charges no admission and has no guidebook, both are found at the Fire Museum. The Mouse Cottage brochure positions that museum as a tribute to childhood, while the Fire Museum is organized as a place for an adult educational experience.

The seriousness of apparent purpose is not to deny that the Fire Museum caters to boyhood fantasies.²⁶ This theme of collecting representations of boyhood dreams featuring rugged adventure is borne out in two of this man's other collections. Displayed in separate rooms of the Mouse Cottage warehouse are his collections of western art, depicting cowboys and Native Americans, and animal trophies from an African hunting safari that the family took in the 1920s. As with the Fire Museum collection, it is difficult to imagine clearer contrasts to the Mouse Museum, even though both of these collectors seem to have been pursuing childhood fantasies of ideal self-images.

Mouse Cottage versus Fire Museum

In contrasting the Mouse Cottage to the Fire Museum, a number of distinctions emerge that we believe are prototypical of gender differences in materials collected. Mouse Cottage displays mice that, although small in nature, are often further miniaturized in replicas; Fire Museum

Table 29.1 Mouse Cottage is to Fire Museum as...

<i>X is</i>	<i>To Y</i>
Tiny	Gigantic
Weak	Strong
Chaos	Order
Home	World
Nature	Machine
Art	Science
Playful	Serious
Inconspicuous	Conspicuous

displays gigantic fire-engines. Mice are weak; men empowered by fire-engines are strong. Mice are chaotically displayed; fire-engines are in orderly rows. Mice are shown within the nurturing environment of home, whereas the fire-engines represent the ability to conquer the external world. Mice are a part of nature, whereas fire-engines are machines used to control nature. The mice replicas are a form of art, while fire-fighting is a mix of technology and science. The mice are playful and decorative, while fire-engines are serious and functional. Mice are inconspicuous, while fire-engines are intentionally conspicuous.

Although not entirely flattering to either gender, these traits parallel stereotypical gender role images. The woman is portrayed by her mouse collection to be small, weak, home-focused, natural, artistic, playful and inconspicuous. Her husband's collections suggest that he is large, strong, proactive, machine-like, scientific, serious and conspicuous. In Laing's terms, They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game.²⁷ In this case, he is playing masculine; she is playing feminine.

ARE THE USES OF COLLECTIONS GENDERED?

In addition to looking at the collection, we can look more processually at the individual's use of the collection and ask how this use reflects or constructs gender identity. We examine two further case-studies to consider ways collectors use a plastic form to work through fantasies and construct a sense of self.

A collection allows the collector to play with multiple images of the self and multiple images of others. The first case-study is based on the Barbie Museum assembled by a woman named Flo. Flo began collecting Barbies eleven years ago, but had collected other dolls prior to that. Four years ago, she underwent a radical mastectomy that interrupted her collecting activity. She had reconstructive as well as extensive corrective surgeries due to complications from the mastectomy. Flo resumed her collecting activity two years later, after recovering from the last of these surgeries. She has two daughters: one collects dolls and the other collects art deco items and antiques. Flo buys dolls for her daughters and granddaughters, but is dismayed that they do not care for the dolls the way she thinks they should. She is appalled that her granddaughters actually play with them.

Flo uses her collecting activities to enact the feminine quality of generosity. Through the museum, she reportedly sells Barbie dolls and related items at reasonable prices to others seeking to complete their collections. If someone is missing a maroon shoe to go with a

particular Barbie outfit, Flo says she will sell the collector that shoe at a very low price. When she attends Barbie conventions, Flo follows a convention custom of giving gifts to the other collectors seated at her dinner-table. She says that her gifts are very generous and widely sought. But she is alarmed to hear people say, 'Next year I want to sit at your table.' She is dismayed that her generosity breeds such greed and selfishness. She also reflected her generosity in saying that she views her collecting as a mothering activity, since mothers are supposed to keep things for their daughters.

The second way Flo uses her collection to reflect gender derives from her pride in its completeness. As a result of another collector's gift of a Pan Am stewardess outfit for Barbie, Flo now possesses a complete collection of the outfits manufactured by Mattel for Barbie, as well as at least one of each Barbie model ever produced. Her use of the collection to demonstrate completeness resonates deeply when contrasted with her difficulties following the removal of her breasts.²⁸ Through owning a full set of authentic Barbies, she is able to restore a sense of completeness. Not only does Barbie possess the kind of figure Flo no longer has, but collecting allows Flo to possess a complete set of these voluptuous dolls.

A second case-study illuminating the gendered use of collections is that of Brent and Barbie's house. This is a very vivid collection and we can learn a great deal about Brent through the Barbie dolls he collects. Although Brent collects the same objects as Flo, they serve a very different gendered purpose in his life. Because Brent's character is quite distinctive, it is easier to trace the process of identity expression through his collection than it sometimes is with more commonplace collections such as baseball cards. Although not all collecting activity is as vividly expressive as Brent's, we find other collections are put to gendered uses as well. While Brent's particular situation is idiosyncratic, it allows us to more clearly see how collections are used to construct meaningful understandings of the complexities of gender.

We can examine collections not just statically in terms of the objects contained in the collection, but also dynamically in terms of the collector's interaction with these objects. One day when one of the authors went to Brent's home to talk with him, she noticed a pile of Barbie clothes that he had just purchased lying on a table. This was the evening after his mother's funeral. Despite the author's concern about doing fieldwork at such a time, Brent said he would really like to talk to her. He said that he bought the Barbie clothes on his way home from the funeral because he felt depressed. Buying clothing for Barbie was his way of making himself feel better.

Collection use may not be limited to expressing the dichotomy of male and female biological sex or the socially prescribed masculine and feminine gender roles pertaining to a culture and time period. In a psychological sense enacted gender can be seen as more of a continuum than a dichotomy. By examining the uses of collections, we can explicate the multiple images that attach to femininity and masculinity. Brent's use of his collection is instrumental here. In his case the Barbies are used to mediate three types of gendered images: real-life images, worldly images, and otherworldly images. Real-life images are those that exist or previously existed in his everyday life. Brent's real-world images come from his life as a child, his former life as an exotic dancer and male prostitute, and his current life as a gay male employed as a hairdresser. Worldly images are expressed directly in the objects in the collection. Otherworldly images are the mythic characters evoked by the collection. In this tripartition, the worldly images of the collection are used to mediate images from everyday life with those that exist in a mythic realm. Thus, a collection can tangibilize the individuation process of constructing an identity through personal myth.²⁹ That is, a collection can be used at times to represent and reconstruct

real life, as well as to fill in what is missing from real life with worldly images linked to mythic images.

We will first examine the feminine images represented in the collections of our case-studies, dividing these feminine images into good and evil, and then into a number of different types of image within each of these categories.

In Brent's collection of Barbie dolls as well as in Mouse's collection of mouse replicas, there are several kinds of feminine representations of good. One of these feminine images of good is the virgin bride. Mouse's collection contains a number of bride figures, including a celluloid of Minnie Mouse as Juliet. In addition, the room adjoining the Mouse Cottage displays family photos, including one of Mouse herself as a bride. Thus, parallels exist between the worldly images in the collection and real life of Mouse. The worldly image of the virgin bride also corresponds to an otherworldly image of woman as angel. This otherworldly image of a diminutive angel personifies goodness. The mice in Mouse's collection are often angelic little figures—like good little girls. This museum also contains a photograph of the woman, Mouse, as a little girl with a big bow in her hair. Again, worldly images in the collection seem to echo the real-life self-image of the collector.

In the house Brent built for Barbie, evidence that Barbie has put away the innocence of a little girl appears in the bedroom, where 'little girl' toys are relegated to the top of a wardrobe. Woman as good little girl is not the feminine image that Brent enacts through his collection of Barbie dolls.

The figure of loving mother is missing in Brent's collection. Not coincidentally, it is also missing in Brent's real-life experience. As a boy, Brent did not experience woman as the loving mother that would be represented in an otherworldly image of a Madonna. Flo's comments about Barbie suggest that the doll was not manufactured to represent the good mother image. She said that Barbie is not a 'baby-person', noting that Mattel had never produced maternity clothing or a baby for Barbie. Her euphemism was, 'Barbie is more a woman of leisure.'

In place of images of woman as loving mother, Brent's collection contains several surrogate mother images. One of these is a blonde doll dressed in blue, whom he named Carol. In real life, Carol was a babysitter Brent fondly recalls from his childhood. He refers to this doll as 'the wholesome one'. This adjective is particularly striking and distinguishes this doll from a number of his other dolls. In a poignant moment during the fieldwork, Brent displayed

Table 29.2 Feminine images and characters

	<i>Otherworldly</i>	<i>Worldly</i>	<i>Real life</i>
Good	Angel	Virgin bride	Self ('Mouse')
	Madonna	Little girl	
	Fairy Godmother	Mother	Babysitter
Evil	Witch	Whore	Prostitute
		Temptress	Mother
		Maid	
		Voyeur	
		Ice Queen	Mother

another doll representing a mythic replacement for the good mother. After arranging all of his male dolls for photographs, Brent perched another doll dressed as a fairy (male as godmother) reigning over the others. Expressing some of the gender identity issues Brent deals with both in real life and through his collection, Brent's fairy godmother image is his Gay Bob doll wearing a pink fairy costume. This display is meaningful to Brent; it also has meaning for our understanding of the uses of worldly images in a collection. Rather than always representing a direct correspondence between the collector's real life and the worldly images of the collection, rather than reflecting the real life of the collector in microcosm, collections also offer the collector an opportunity to construct a fully controllable world of objects in which mythic images and reconstructed reality can be manipulated. The controllable world of the collection is one in which fantastic gender images can be played with in a constructive and bounded way.

Feminine embodiments of evil are also often evident in collections. These images, together with the multiple images of good discussed, support the contention that masculine and feminine are categories of meaning that are more psychologically complex than a simple dichotomy. Masculine and feminine are complex categories of meaning, each represented by multiple images of both good and evil. Unlike sex, enacted gender is not readily dichotomized.

One feminine image of evil is that of woman as whore, linked to an otherworldly image of woman as witch. In his collection Brent has an oversize Barbie doll that he has painted with extremely heavy eye makeup. He described this doll disparagingly as 'a whore'. She had been placed next to a Miss Piggy doll—a deliberate connection between whore and swine.

The simultaneous anger and fascination with feminine images of evil expressed by Brent through this and other dolls is based in his real-life experience. He worked as a male prostitute and an exotic dancer for a short time to support himself while he attended beauty school. His verbal descriptions of these experiences are replete with scornful references to the women he served and entertained. During that time, the only help he received from his mother was a \$25 cheque that he said she gave him so she could tell her friends she was helping put him through school. He very much resented this claim of assistance at a time when he needed so much more, and therefore he never cashed the cheque.

Brent expressed a similarly scornful attitude towards dolls representing the feminine evil image of the temptress. He dressed one Barbie in a silver lamé evening gown worn backwards to show more cleavage. Oddly, given his action in dressing her, he then verbally disparaged the doll's supposed desire to show off her breasts. This temptress image, too, is linked to Brent's recollection of his mother. After his parents divorced, Brent said his mother would bring other men to the house and he would hear her with them in the other room. Not only did he refer to some of his Barbie dolls as tramps, but just after his mother's funeral he also referred to her as a tramp.

Brent's anger at what he considered evil in other people was also periodically expressed through the subjugation of Barbie dolls in the collection. At one point during the fieldwork, particularly racist anger was directed towards his black Barbie dolls. He 'took-away their nice dresses', put them in maids' costumes and 'made them get down on the floor [of the Barbie house] and scrub it'. This punishment was prompted by his anger towards a black man in his real life.

Another feminine image of evil represented in Brent's collection is woman as voyeur. Like Brent's mother and those who hired him as an exotic dancer or male prostitute, the female

voyeur is distanced and uses men for her own pleasure, without caring about them. There was a set of binoculars at the foot of one of Barbie's beds; Brent said that she used the binoculars to watch men and then pleasure herself. His description of this activity expressed simultaneous fascination and anger.

The most vivid feminine image of evil in Brent's collection is that of Ice Queen—a woman who is beautiful, coldly brittle and absolutely rejecting of males. The ice queen in the collection is Brent's 'number one Barbie', the first model Mattel sold. It is the most valuable doll in Brent's collection. When this one enters the room, Brent says that she makes the other dolls bow down. Thus, like Brent himself, the other dolls reportedly hate and fear the number one Barbie. Brent says he cannot keep the number one and the other dolls in the same room for fear of what would happen if they began fighting. Number one Barbie, says Brent, is vain and concerned only with her own appearance. Brent displays her in a red coffin-like box that he prepared for her. Much of Brent's description of this Barbie doll would also fit his real-life experience of his mother when he was a child. His simultaneous fascination with and contempt for women's vanity is perhaps especially understandable since he is a hairdresser.

Thus, a number of feminine images are included in collections and are used in the ongoing process of constructing personal gender identity and gender meanings. Similar identity work occurs through the use of masculine images. The Ken dolls in Brent's collection incorporate several masculine images of good. The worldly image of a businessman in a grey suit is similar to an otherworldly image of a king—a man who is wealthy, benevolent and powerful. The worldly image of a sailor or rugged outdoors-man corresponds to the otherworldly image of hero.³⁰ It is especially significant that all of these masculine images of good were absent in Brent's real life. Through his collection he finds a way to participate in their meaning.

Also in Brent's collection is a worldly image of a cowboy—an image also present in the western art collection of the man who founded the Fire Museum. The cowboy represents a hero who can round up other beings and corral them for his purposes. Brent's collection of masculine images of good also includes an athlete and a prep or college boy. These wholesome images are heroic masculine counterparts to the wholesome babysitter/surrogate-mother described earlier.

In other collections, different worldly, masculine representations of good are included. For example, man-as-rescuer in the worldly form of a fireman is celebrated at the Fire Museum. This worldly image can be linked to the otherworldly image of masculine saviour. In the Fire Museum, the tools and machines which transform man into a saviour are enshrined.

Table 29.3 Masculine images and characters

	<i>Otherworldly</i>	<i>Worldly</i>	<i>Real life</i>
Good	King Hero Saviour	Businessman Soldier, Sailor Athlete Cowboy Rescuer, Fireman Boy	Self (Brent)
Evil	Devil Snake	Nazi soldier Wild beasts Slave, Servant	Father

The same image of fireman is included by Mouse in the Mouse Museum, humorously diminished in size and reduced to the status of a mouse fireman holding an axe atop a doll house. This is a feminized version of the heroism enshrined in the Fire Museum. It is hardly believable that this little mouse could chop through the roof and save someone. In gender terms, the feminine qualities of the mouse make its attempts to undertake the masculine job of rescuing others and controlling nature laughable. In the comedy we find in this little mouse, we experience pleasurable release through the expression of an unconscious form of sexism.³¹

The final masculine image of good we will discuss is the little boy. Brent claimed that one boy doll in his collection represents him as a little boy. Brent displayed it in a box beside several other dolls. Brent got the adult male doll in the box when he was a little boy. It represents the good soldier father—not at all like Brent's real father. In Brent's display, this doll's arm had been pulled out of its rigid socket to permit the doll to put his arm proudly around the boy. In the same box is an image of a black evil mother and a sister, although in real life Brent's two siblings were brothers. In this one box, Brent includes good and evil images, masculine and feminine images, and worldly and otherworldly images with real-world referents.

Masculine images of evil are also included in collections. Brent's Nazi soldier doll represents an otherworldly image of the devil, as well as the real-world image of his father. Before his parents were divorced, Brent recalls that his father would destroy his toys by throwing them across the room, especially when he came home and found Brent playing with dolls. Brent's current interests in doll preservation and restoration are clearly linked to these experiences.

Another masculine image of evil is reflected in the collection of hunting trophies displayed by the man who started the Fire Museum. Here the collector is able to control the wild beasts that represent a masculine image of evil nature. Like the collection of fire-fighting tools displayed in the Fire Museum, this collection celebrates masculine domination over nature. The worldly images of these wild animal trophies correspond to an otherworldly image of the evil serpent. They are tamed through the collection—conquered, captured and hung on the wall. Similarly, after having an orangutan for a pet, this man symbolized his dominance over nature by having the orangutan stuffed and included in the collection when it died.

In Brent's collection, there are also masculine images of evil subjugated. At the time when Brent was dealing with the racially directed anger in his real life, besides making his black Barbies scrub the floor, he also subjugated a black male doll by casting him in the role of Barbie's servant/bartender. In this way, Brent took steps to control man's evil nature—his fear of the potential for evil within himself.

The feminine and masculine worldly images contained in a collection can be used to connect otherworldly meanings to real-world experiences. They do so by direct representation as well as by filling in what is otherwise missing in the person's life. Through these meanings, collections are used to mediate real world experience with otherworldly images in a way that attempts to reconstruct and resolve personal issues concerning gender.

ARE THE SOCIETAL FUNCTIONS OF COLLECTIONS GENDERED?

The final question we will address is the larger question of whether the societal functions served by collections are gendered. In answering this question, we will consider both the manifest and latent functions of collecting activity.³²

From a societal perspective, collections represent and enact the achievement orientation of the collector. However, like other aspects of life, collections can represent two different kinds of achievement—two worlds of achievement in Carol Gilligan's terms.³³ That is, achievement may represent different ideas to men and women. Women's collections tend to represent achievement in the world of connection to other people—achievement of sentiment. A substantial number of the items in the Mouse Cottage were given to Mouse by other people who knew of her collection. The display of these gift items in the museum enshrines Mouse's connections to others. Also enshrined in that display is the belief that, through the museum, she brings happiness to others and makes it seem like Christmas all year long. The Christmas tree displayed year-round at the Mouse Cottage allows Mouse to fulfil the feminine achievement of delivering holiday happiness to a wider set of people than her own family.³⁴ The mouse collection also demonstrates her achievement in the world of interpersonal connection and sentiment by illustrating her capacity to transform intruding pests into cute decorations, not unlike the way some mothers dress and otherwise treat their children.

The contrast of Mouse's collection to the collections of her husband shows how the masculine achievement world differs from the feminine. Here, the powerful achievements of masculine control over nature are exemplified through killing wild beasts, conquering the west, and fighting fires. In such ways collections perform the societal function of gendering achievement worlds, while celebrating the societal importance of achievement.³⁵

A second societal function served by collecting activity is pattern maintenance³⁶ within the economic sphere. Collecting activity serves to support economic activity through the purchase of objects that are not functionally necessary. Collected objects are regarded as desirable and valuable, even though they are removed from everyday use. Thus, collecting supports a consumer culture. It allows both genders to participate in the feminine world of consumption in a way that simultaneously supports the masculine world of production. Through the protectionism it engenders among collectors, collecting serves the societal function of pattern maintenance. A third societal function of collecting is reification and integration of gender dialectics. Through collecting, culture is made visible.³⁷ Intrapersonally, collecting permits experimentation with androgyny as an individual participates in the masculine hunt for additions to the collection, as well as feminine nurturance in curating the collection. Interpersonally, collecting activity may bond couples, particularly those whose children have left home, in a gendered activity in which both can seek their specializations within the division of labour.³⁸