

# Why They Collect: Collectors Reveal Their Motivations

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*This paper reviews traditional psychoanalytic ideas on the motivations of collectors as well as newer "relational-model" psychoanalytic approaches focussing on the development and stability of the self. Descriptive data on motivations are presented, based on 112 collectors' responses to a questionnaire and 55 letters from collectors. Categorization of motivations was based on the meanings of collecting (1) to the self; (2) to others; (3) as preservation, restoration, history, and a sense of continuity; (4) as financial investment, and (5) as addiction. Suggestions for future research include the use of in-depth interviews with collectors over a period of years in efforts to further explore motivations as well as changes in collecting patterns over time.*

Collecting is an important part of some people's lives as attested to by the many magazines on collecting and by fairs inviting collectors' participation. Despite its importance, most examinations of collecting have appeared in the popular press and relatively few scholarly papers have been published. The first part of this paper surveys a portion of this scholarly work, focusing on psychoanalytic theories of the motivations of collectors. The second part offers preliminary data from an empirical study of collectors who were asked to speculate on the motivation to collect.

We shall first refer to Freud and his followers who derived the individual's relationship to possessions and to collecting from the sexual drive. We shall then discuss notions about possessions and collecting from one of the newer "relational-model" theories.

## EARLY PSYCHOANALYTIC THOUGHT

Early contributions to the motivation to collect derive from Freud's biological drive model (1963), and were elaborated on by Jones (1912), Abraham (1927) and Fenichel (1945). These writers asserted a continuity between infant experience and adult personality traits. During one of the "psychosexual stages," the "anal" stage, when infants' libidinal pleasures are related to sphincter control, a connection was asserted to exist be-

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Rudmin, F.W. (Ed.), (1991). To have possessions: A handbook on ownership and property. [Special Issue]. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 275-286.

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