Collecting Away Their Suffering:

Meaningful Hobbies and the Processing of Traumatic Experience

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Dedicated to:

the collectors in my life, who are some of my oldest friends,

and my nephew Max Benjamin Berger, my newest friend, born June 25, 2011.

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between trauma and meaningful hobbies. I combined the scholarship on collecting with the broader research on leisure, coping, and posttraumatic growth to explore how meaningful collections may have helped victims metabolize their traumatic experiences. I interviewed self-selected trauma survivors who felt that they had a collection that was related to a traumatic experience. Through qualitative interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis, I explored collectors' experiences with trauma and hobbies. The purpose of this study is to better understand the retrospective connections people make between their chosen hobbies and the trauma they have experienced. This study could potentially have implications for treating survivors of trauma.

Chapter 1

One day, "Curt" and I were talking about our collections. He was someone I had always seen as a generous, funny, sweet man. I asked him, "Why did you start collecting stuff from Southeast Asia?"

He looked me in the eye and said, "I fought in Vietnam. I did terrible things. I shot people at point blank range. I didn't even know the first thing about Vietnam. Now, I study Southeast Asia. It's too late to fix anything, but at least it's showing some respect." (Personal Communication with "Curt," June, 2005)

Curt's story served as an inspiration for this project. For Curt, collecting paper money was a way to start understanding the Vietnamese people, which led to his decision to return to Vietnam. Currently, Curt provides scholarships and support for individual Vietnamese children in need. Curt's story is an example of how a hobby helped a person metabolize a traumatic experience. This study explores other examples of this phenomenon in order to understand the connection between meaningful collections and the processing of traumatic experiences.

As a numismatist (a person who studies the history of money), I often hear stories about how people began collecting. I started to notice a pattern; many people said they came to the hobby and "accidentally" found themselves dealing with traumatic experiences that they had hoped to forget. Retrospectively, the collectors' narratives reflected on the "coincidence" that their particular area of interest related to painful memories that needed to be processed.

As I described this observation to my colleagues, I heard about their anecdotal examples of connections between hobbyists' traumas and their hobbies. For example, many people described friends who had taken over the collections of loved ones who had passed away. In these cases, they noticed that the collection became a continued connection to a person who was

lost. This was also observed by Subkowski (2006), who noticed that although fewer women than men collect, female collectors were often continuing a collection from their fathers. Although "leisure time" is often looked at lightly, this is an example of a hobby that can hold deep meaning.

As I continued investigating this topic, I ran into many people with anecdotes about similar connections, but very little in terms of research. Therefore, I tried to pull apart the different components of the phenomenon as I had observed it in order to understand them individually. I combined the research on collecting, research on the related leisure counseling, and the literature on coping with trauma. I then compared and combined these literatures to form a cohesive narrative about the potential healing power of hobbies and, in particular, collecting. I thus decided to propose this study, in which I used qualitative interviewing to analyze the stories of collectors who felt they had used their hobby to process their traumatic experiences.

Much of the previous research on collecting has investigated the reasons people collect. These include a need for completion (Carey, 2008), an innate desire to hunt for things of value (Formanek, 1991; Storr, 1983), and a search for a personally meaningful connection to the collector's past history (Caldwell, 2005; Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2004; Crispell, 1988; Muensterberger, 1994; Subkowski, 2006). Collecting was also seen as a method of personal discovery and improved sense of self (Belk, 1995; Formanek, 1991; Storr, 1983; Subkowski, 2006). Finally, collecting was described as a way for people to connect with a larger community (Belk, 1995; Pecoskie, 2006). I observed that these factors together provided a potential natural context for traumatic healing.

Similarly, leisure counseling is a therapeutic approach that incorporates natural, leisurely activities into treatment. Researchers have looked at a very broad definition of "leisure" and

applied it to stressful situations and trauma. They found that meaningful leisure activities were the most helpful in reducing the impact of stress (Arai, Griffin, Miatello, & Grieg, 2008; Leitner & Leitner, 2005). They also found that leisure could form a positive connection to a person's pre-trauma self (Juniper, 2005). Overall, leisure seemed to help motivate people to deal with their stresses and keep them in perspective (Hutchinson, Loy, Kleiber, & Dattilo, 2003; Leitner & Leitner, 2005). The leisure research provided indirect support for the connection between collecting, trauma, and recovery.

The coping literature is divided into research on resilience, coping strategies, and posttraumatic growth. Resilience focuses on protective factors that increase a person's chances of coming away from a traumatic event healthfully. Several of these protective factors seem related to the reported benefits of collecting: high self-esteem, a sense of personal control, and social connection (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski, Kraaij, Schroevers, & Somsen, 2008; Schroever & Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & van der Hart, 1996).

Coping with trauma can be seen as a process of making sense of the traumatic experience and incorporating it into the victim's understanding of the world (Dörfel, Rabe, & Karl, 2008; Everly, 1995; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Positive coping strategies include increasing the victim's competence, mastery, and ability to engage with the trauma thoughtfully (Dörfel et al., 2008; Zautra, 2009;). This literature encourages therapists to help their clients regain a sense of personal control, turn to support systems, and make connections between the trauma and its impact on current experiences (Burnell, Coleman, & Hunt, 2006; Herman, 1997; Lewis, 2004; Stern, 2009; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Posttraumatic growth occurs when a person comes away from a trauma with increased personal strength, personal perspective, sense of purpose, and

personal connections (Feder et al., 2008). The use of positive coping strategies directly enhances posttraumatic growth (Garnefski et al., 2008; Schroevers & Teo, 2008).

In order to understand the connection between collecting and the processing of traumatic experience, it is important to have a more thorough understanding of collectors and their relationships with their collections, as well as their traumatic experiences. In reading about treatment for people who have suffered from a traumatic event, I noticed an overlap between some of the treatment approaches and collecting. For example, Everly (1995) described community as an important aspect of treating trauma. He suggested that people needed to feel supported and understood by others with related or shared experiences. Similarly, I have found that a major element behind collecting is the experience of being part of a group of people who communicate and understand one another at a deep level. I was curious to explore others' experience of collecting to see if a natural connection between trauma and collecting seemed to exist.

The primary aim of this study is to understand how people experience hobbies as a way to metabolize traumatic experiences. Due to the dearth of literature on the connection between collecting and coping, I approached this as an exploratory study. I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) because of its virtues as an exploratory qualitative approach. IPA is designed to respect and give voice to people's complex, unique experiences, which seemed critical given the topic (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Research Questions

My research questions focused on how people used collecting to process traumatic experiences over time. I was also curious about both the conscious and unconscious connections that participants experienced between their collections and their trauma. I learned about these

connections through participants' retrospective narratives and through analysis of their interviews. These questions helped provide focus and a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

1. What connections exist in participants' narratives about their traumatic experiences and their collections?
2. How did participants' relationships with their collections change as their understanding of their trauma evolved?
3. To what extent did participants consciously use collecting as a way of working through traumatic experiences?
4. What kinds of retrospective meanings did participants discover over time?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study considered how collecting may help collectors process traumatic experiences. I became interested in this topic after hearing several collectors observe that their collections were the way they dealt with traumatic experiences that were too difficult to think about otherwise. In this literature review, I began by outlining some of the theoretical approaches to understanding collecting, as well as the limited empirical research on collecting. Next, I described the larger umbrella of leisure counseling, and the research on the purposeful use of leisure activities to manage stress and trauma. Finally, I briefly summarized the research on coping in order to identify some possible connections between collecting and the processing of trauma.

Theories on Collecting

Despite the statistic that one in three adults in the United States collects something (O'Brien, 1981), collecting itself has not received much scholarly attention (Formanek, 1991). Although collecting has not been studied often, it was studied very early by Freud, who was himself an avid collector of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian statues. He connected collecting to the anal-retentive type, seeing it as a metaphor for wanting to have control and "hold in" feelings (Muensterberger, 1994). Freud described his own collection of statues as a way to keep hold of places he had visited and loved (Storr, 1983). Janine Burke (2006), one of Freud's biographers, hypothesized that Freud also used his collection as therapy to deal with the loss of his father, noting that he began his collection the same year his father passed away: "Freud regarded mourning as work… Freud did not seem to have any problem replacing [his father] Jacob: he consoled himself with artworks" (p. 143-144). She also reported that he had purchased specific

items that she says were connected to the idea of "father" and to his father's strong Jewish heritage which, throughout his life, Freud otherwise rebelled against.

A collector is defined as "a person who is motivated to accumulate a series of similar objects where the instrumental function of the objects is of secondary (or no) concern and the person does not plan to immediately dispose of the objects" (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004, p. 86). In the case of collecting, the acquisition of objects involves a unique passion that is distinctive from other kinds of material attainment (Belk, 1995). Kuersteiner (2000), who contributes to *The Wrapper*, a magazine for non-sports card collectors, cited the following list of "just a few" of the collectibles he had observed: "Bricks, soda caps, keys, locks, mugs, bugs, barbed wire, knives, swords, guns, cactus, subway tokens, marbles, bottles, beer cans, cereal boxes, rubber stamps, fruit labels, flags, license plates, old time radio dramas, match books, puzzles, Pez, paper weights, postcards, newspapers, magazines, comic books, and of course, the ever popular coin and stamp collections" (p. 18). These examples show some of the array of collections that people pursue.

Carey (2008) approached collecting as an economic psychologist. She wanted to create a model for why people collected and how their collections could be understood in terms of value. She saw that collecting was at times irrational, with objects that seemed "useless" being pursued at high cost. Carey researched social psychology and the collecting literature. From these, she determined that there were five possible motivations: (a) the desire to enhance or commemorate a personal experience, (b) novelty, (c) nostalgia, (d) notoriety, or (e) aesthetics. She ultimately described collectors as seeking a "complete set," which she said explained the otherwise unusual values placed on collectible items. For example, she described Toy Biz's Lord of the Rings action figure series. She described how, although non-collectors may be able to appreciate

individual dolls, a *collector* would hope to get one of each figure in each variation. In this case, the collectors focused on the "Twilight Frodo" doll. Although the doll itself had no more inherent value than other plastic action figures, its rarity (initially only one in every 6-10 cases) meant it was worth more to collectors. Anyone who wanted a complete set of the Lord of the Rings action figures would likely need to pay more in order to get this uncommon piece. According to Carey, this is a part of the excitement for the collector—he or she needs to seek out each part and has a sense of accomplishment in piecing everything together.

Several scholars have tried to understand collecting from a biological standpoint. Formanek (1991) connected collecting to people's desire to hunt. The hunter locates his prey, plans his attack, acquires the prey amid competition, and is then able to feel powerful and hold his trophy for all to see. This is similar to how an individual pursues a piece for his or her collection—the collector has to locate an object of desire, plan how to obtain it, beat other collectors at acquiring it, and then find ways of displaying it. Similarly, Storr (1983) compared collectors to the bowerbird, which collects attractive and colorful pieces to create a display that will win him a mate. Along these lines, people also create collections as a way to show other people what is beautiful or important to them. Active collecting can help a person feel like he or she can make and accomplish goals (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004). Organized collections were also described as a way of acting out a desire to make some order out of the chaos of life (Storr, 1983). In general, these researchers found that collecting was more about the art of searching than necessarily reaching the level of completion described by Carey (2008).

In working with traumatized children, therapists often turn to play therapy. As Erikson (1963) explained, play therapy allows children to have an alternative experience with their trauma, one that restores their feelings of mastery. They recreate their traumatic situation through

whatever toys and objects are available in order to safely experiment with different outcomes and plans. Similarly, Piaget noticed that children need play to control the things in life that are otherwise uncontrollable (Singer & Revenson, 1978). I have wondered if, in some ways, collecting is an opportunity for adults to play out their traumatic experiences. As Stern observed, adults often require metaphor to feel safe as they work through trauma (2009). He also noted that these metaphors are often found unconsciously and unexpectedly. They appear as separate interests that can later be identified as coping metaphors. Just as a child turns to toys to feel empowered to regain control, an adult can turn to a collection that renews his feelings of mastery.

Other theorists posited that collecting was more along the lines of Freud's statues—people collect because their collections hold sentimental meaning: "Collectibles are the 'old trivia' that evoke the daily life of the past" (Crispell, 1988, p. 40). Some scholars have said that collecting is a way to connect to the past and to understand history (Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2004). At a more personal level, collectors described their collections as a way to maintain emotional connections to people with whom they were bonded, such as the frequency of women continuing collections their fathers began (Subkowski, 2006). A collector can either keep his collection as a private, personal connection to the world or he can join one of the many clubs and organizations located throughout the country and the world (Crispell, 1988).

Muensterberger (1994) hypothesized that many people's current collections were related to their early experiences. As an example, he described a man who collected bells because he had grown up in a monastery, as an orphan. For him, the monastery bells were reminders of his youthful days of solace. Similarly, Subkowski (2006) posited: "There is always a close and mostly unconscious relationship between the concrete object of collection and an individual's

life history" (p. 286). Collectors unconsciously choose collections that forge a functional connection between their past and current lives.

Another scholarly perspective suggests that collections add meaning to people's lives. Storr (1983) described the collector's enthusiasm with this quote: "The passionate collector seems almost to fall in love with certain objects and, by coming to possess them, makes them an intimate part of himself" (p. 36). Caldwell (2005) suggested that hobbies were used to add meaning to life, and can help a person better realize his or her potential. As Cassidy (2005) pointed out, much of what people do is determined by their responsibilities. However, hobbies are distinctive in that people can choose them based solely on interest. Thus, they are a unique opportunity for the self to be free. Storr (1983) suggested that true collectors were able to use their hobby to assist along a journey of self-discovery. Subkowski (2006), whose theories were derived from his psychoanalytic approach, described the possibility of unhealthy, un-integrated collecting as well as healthy, integrated collecting. He incorporated collecting into his treatment of clients, where he suggested that integrated collectors were able to use their collections to make sense of their neuroses and to repair their worldviews. He suggested that people used their collections symbolically to repair past object losses in their lives. The collection provided a "safe" place for exploring early losses and working through them.

Overall, the scholarship on collecting suggests a number of themes relevant to traumatic healing. Collecting was described as a search for wholeness (Carey, 2008), a desire that may be exacerbated by a trauma, which leaves a victim feeling unsteady in his worldview (Everly, 1995). There was also a repeated emphasis placed on personal meaning-making and connections between the present and the past (Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2004; Crispell, 1988; Muensterberger, 1994; Storr, 1983). Finally, collecting was described as a way for increasing personal

understanding of the self (Caldwell, 2005; Storr, 1983; Subkowski, 2006).

Empirical Research on Collecting

Only a very limited amount of empirical research has looked specifically at collecting and how people perceive the meanings behind their collections. These studies investigated and tried to define collectors by attempting to find shared themes among them. Subkowski (2006) explored these concepts in great depth through a psychoanalytic case study of one of his clients. He wanted to show the development of collecting from pre-Oedipal to a more integrated Oedipal mode, as experienced through transference. Subkowski's case study described and analyzed his work with a forty-year-old man who saw him four times a week for about 3 years (i.e., about 600 sessions). The subject had suffered from dyslexia and his mother had called him "stupid." Subkowski found that it was healing for his subject to become a book collector and thus to overcome his childhood inadequacy. Subkowski described how, over time, they used books as a metaphor to help manage the client's relational challenges. This case study revealed a vivid example of mastering trauma through collecting and leisure. Scientifically speaking, however, the study was quite limited, in that it was only able to describe the experience of one collector through the narrow and biased lens of his psychoanalyst.

In 2006, Pecoskie presented a paper about her qualitative study on the relationship between lesbian women and their book collections. She used narrative, participant-centered interviews with eleven lesbian women. Through the analysis of these interviews, she discovered themes about how much significance books can hold for people. She determined that books were different from other kinds of objects because they are both a text full of authors' ideas and a thing itself with its own history (a gift, a purchase, something protected, something that has been read again and again). She also found that her participants described their books as a way they

represented themselves. The study showed that some women found books to be protective, both as a physical "symbolic nest," and as a reminder of people connected to their cause. Many of the women said that their books served to remind them of their personal histories and culture. They also suggested that books provided a sense of community, and that donating books made them feel connected to the generations yet to come. This study provided some insight into how objects can be meaningful and can connect people to a community and can even serve as a legacy for future communities. However, her article was somewhat cursory and did not provide many details about the depth of connection between her participants' experiences as lesbian women and their books.

More broadly, Formanek (1991) conducted a study to investigate the meanings and motivations behind collecting. She advertised at her university and in various publications, including the New York Times, Antique Trader, and Clocks Magazine, to recruit collectors and non-collectors to complete open-ended questionnaires. She reported that most of the 112 participants she found to complete the questionnaires were from a set she gave to professors at Hofstra to give to their students, friends, and family. However, she also received 57 letters from collectors and dealers who had seen her ads, which she incorporated into her study as descriptive data.

Formanek (1991) used the questionnaire responses and the descriptive letters to analyze collectors' motivations. She concluded that people had many motivations: they enjoyed the challenge of the hunt, they liked gathering knowledge, they enjoyed the connection to the past, they anticipated potential financial returns, and/or they felt connected to other people through their collections. Most relevant to the proposed study were three themes she described as "Meanings in Relation to the Self" (p. 281): (a) a defense against feeling low, (b) a challenge,

and (c) a way to maintain self-esteem. Overall, she said that collecting tended to be an emotional venture that increased confidence and a sense of empowerment.

Formanek's (1991) study was an attempt to use some open-ended questions to understand the motivation for collecting. However, her survey methodology made it impossible for her to ask follow-up questions or to gain deeper insight into the unique stories of the individual respondents. It also seemed noteworthy that 57 collectors chose to send her letters rather than completing her questionnaire, which may suggest that they wanted the opportunity to speak more openly about their experiences.

In contrast, Belk (1995) performed a qualitative study of over 200 collectors. He recruited collectors from collector shows, conventions, exhibits, and from personal interactions and referrals among collectors. He used what he called 1-2 hour "depth interviews" and observation to analyze the risks and benefits of collecting. Belk used a constant comparative method. Through his analysis, he determined that the main problems collectors faced were the possibility of addiction/obsession, materialism, and loss of connection to their families. He reported that most collectors joked about addiction without actually suffering from it. However, he did note that the families of collectors make sacrifices both economically and relationally with collectors who make their collections a priority.

Belk (1995) also found that collectors experienced several benefits, including a sense of purpose and meaning from collecting. He also observed that collectors used success in their hobbies to compensate for other less successful aspects of their lives, such as their careers—collectors may be heroes in the collecting world while being average in their workplaces. He also observed that collections provided collectors with a positive connection to the past. Finally, he found that collectors were able to access a support system of friends. Many

of the collectors he interviewed reported that some of their closest friends were collectors and that they turned to their collecting communities for camaraderie.

Belk's (1995) study suggests several potential mechanisms by which people may use hobbies to deal with trauma, particularly the support system of friends and the connection to the past. Nonetheless, the study's purpose was quite broad, and there was little mention specifically of any link between trauma and collecting. In aggregate, these studies suggest that collecting may provide self-care benefits to participants. However, they only touched on the connections between collecting and trauma. Therefore, I expanded my search toward the broader idea of leisure, which encompasses collecting among other free-time activities.

Leisure Counseling Research

People experience many benefits through their leisure activities. Recreational activities have long been viewed as healthy, providing a way to: mediate stress; develop, maintain, or protect self-image; retain/develop social identities; gain esteem; display, apply, and develop skills; achieve; exercise power; satisfy curiosity; achieve closure or master a problem area; and attain creative self-fulfillment (Driver, 1972). The literature on leisure counseling also outlines the ways in which leisure specifically impacts stress and trauma (Schneider & Iwasaki, 2003; Trenberth & Dewe, 2005).

Leisure counseling is not a perfect fit for this study. First, in leisure counseling, "leisure" is defined broadly to include a range of activities from being a serious collector to taking a moment to enjoy a cup of tea or a good book (Iwasaki, Mactavish, & Mackay, 2005). Although leisure counseling does not focus specifically on collecting, the leisure counseling research has enough in common to be useful in understanding the connection between hobbies and healing. Second, there is much more research on leisure counseling and stress rather than leisure

counseling and trauma. However, in a few studies, leisure scholars have suggested that leisure may be helpful specifically in victims' recovery from traumatic experiences (Arai et al., 2008; Hutchinson et al., 2003; Juniper, 2003). Therefore, I have synthesized the material from leisure counseling research into five relevant themes, which I have outlined below.

A distraction from stress. First, researchers describe leisure as a distraction from stress (Hutchinson et al., 2003; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Trenberth & Dewe, 2005). At times, people choose to or need to create distance between themselves and their stressors. Hobbies can be engaging for the mind, bringing it away from matters of frustration or pain. Hobbies often draw people out of their homes and workplaces and into other environments, thus providing a more literal getaway from stress (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

Structure. Second, according to Hutchinson et al. (2003), leisure activities can provide structure. When people are stressed, they often feel like they lack control over their situation. Many leisure activities, such as sports, are structured in nature: they have rules, beginnings, endings, and a sense of predictability. Thus, structured leisure activities can provide a person with a restored sense of containment (Juniper, 2005).

Positive self-perception. Researchers also found that leisure could improve how people perceived themselves. Those who participated in leisure tended to have improved moods (Leitner & Leitner, 2005) and increased optimism (Cassidy, 2005; Griffin, 2005; Hutchinson et al., 2003). They were also more confident in themselves (Griffin, 2005). These qualities help people to feel more empowered in everyday life (Iwasaki et al., 2005). People who participated in leisure activities were also more likely to feel motivated to cope with the challenges they faced and confront their traumatic experiences (Hutchinson et al., 2003; Juniper, 2005).

Insight and perspective. Leisure can also serve as a conduit to increased self-reflection.

This is particularly true when a person chooses a leisure activity that has meaning for them or is related to their trauma (Leitner & Leitner, 2005). In particular, if a person has experienced a traumatic event, it can be healing to return to his previous leisure activities because it reconnects him to his pre-trauma self (Hutchinson et al., 2003). For example, if an avid football fan experienced a spinal cord injury, watching football with his friends may help remind him that he is still himself, even with his new physical limitations.

Leisure has also been shown to help boost people's insight (Arai et al., 2008; Iwasaki et al., 2005). Leisure activities provide an opportunity for people to think about a stressor from a different perspective. Depending upon the activity, participants have reported seeing their problems with new social, cultural, or spiritual understandings (Iwasaki et al., 2005). The studies suggested that leisure was most effective if people were actively thinking about the connections between their leisure and their life, although it was described as helpful either way (Arai et al., 2008). In particular, some people were able to use their hobbies to approach, confront, and overcome specific stressors (Leitner & Leitner, 2005). This phenomenon occurs frequently among children, who use their playtime to work through challenges metaphorically (Erikson, 1963). For instance, a child who has been called little may spend recess acting as Spider-man, a small-framed person who was still able to become a hero.

Community. Finally, leisure is effective at helping people manage stress or trauma because it provides access to a larger community (Griffin, 2005; Hutchinson et al., 2003). Formal, structured leisure groups can be especially helpful because they provide an entrée into connection with like-minded individuals. For instance, when a person joins a book club, she can assume she will be meeting other people who enjoy reading, discussion, and culture. Leisure can also connect people spontaneously, such as a person in a coffee shop who approaches another

patron because she is reading one of her favorite authors. Leisure can be the door into communication for a person who is in need of personal connection.

Leisure based communities can help people to experience fun, improve confidence, and increase optimism (Griffin, 2005). They have also been described as supportive and normalizing (Hutchinson et al., 2005). For example, if someone were to lose a close family member, it might be helpful for him to follow through with his weekly poker game because it provides continuity to life before the loss and it means he is surrounded by friends. This sort of activity can allow him to escape into his community (by talking about unrelated topics) or to delve into his loss (by talking about it with close friends).

In general, leisure counseling researchers suggested that leisure could be very effective at helping people manage stress and trauma. However, there are also three main challenges to the use of the leisure counseling literature for understanding any potential connection between collecting and traumatic healing. First, leisure counseling uses such a very broad definition of "leisure." Thus, researchers and scholars were often comparing very involved activities (such as sculpture workshops) with more casual activities (such as relaxing with a book). Second, in general, the leisure counseling literature has been more theoretical than empirical to date, identifying the potential benefits of hobbies without investigating their real-life impact (Bobehr & Regehr, 2006). However, leisure counseling is a growing field within positive psychology, and will likely be better understood as researchers continue to investigate it.

Trauma, Resilience, Coping, and Posttraumatic Growth

Trauma is both a unique and common experience. It is unique because people face such a wide array of different traumatic experiences. Lauterbach and Vrana (2001) defined traumatic events as exposure to "accidents, natural disasters, crime, child abuse, rape, adult abusive

experiences, witnessing the death/mutilation of someone, being in a dangerous or life-threatening situation, or receiving news of the unexpected or sudden death of a loved one" (p. 33). Along with the many forms of trauma, personal reactions to trauma differ greatly as well, even among people who have experienced the same traumatic event (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). Trauma is also a shared experience because many (if not most) people experience one or more traumatic events over the course of a lifetime. One study found that over fifty percent of adults had been exposed to something traumatic (Levine, Laufer, Stein, Hamama-Raz, & Solomon, 2009). Another study focused on college students and found that eighty percent of freshmen had already experienced at least one traumatic event (Lauterbach & Vrana, 2001).

Post-traumatic stress disorder is one of the most commonly diagnosed psychiatric disorders (van der Kolk et al., 1996). Yet, of those people who have experienced something traumatic, studies suggest that only a small proportion develops post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Ozer and Weiss (2004), 10% of women and 5% of men are predicted to develop PTSD in their lifetimes. Other studies that have looked at specific types of trauma have found that between eight and thirty percent of people develop PTSD or other psychiatric disorders after traumatic experiences (Dörfel et al., 2008; Levine et al., 2009; Zautra, 2009). Researchers such as Freedman (2008) have asked why people have different outcomes after similar traumatic experiences. Similarly, McCann and Pearlman (1990) have described how diverse contexts impact people's reactions to trauma. In other words, what helps people either resist or recover from the deleterious consequences of trauma?

In order to approach this question, I investigated the literature on resilience, coping, post-traumatic growth, and current suggestions about therapy for victims of trauma. My intent in doing so was to look at the variety of ways people survive trauma—by resisting its impact in the

first place, by processing it after the fact, or by learning from it over time. As I went through these studies, I looked for points of overlap with the collecting literature to elucidate the connections between collecting and the processing of traumatic experience. Ultimately, I observed four main themes from the trauma and coping literature that were repeated in the research on collecting, as reflected in the descriptions below.

Social supports. The research on coping emphasizes the importance of a supportive community. The existence of a support network can influence whether a trauma survivor develops PTSD or not. If a person does develop PTSD, personal supports can help them to cope, heal, and overcome their symptoms (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Brende, 1995; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski et al., 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Schroevers & Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk et al., 1996). In general, people with support systems are better able to use different recovery methods and can both think and talk about their experiences more fully (Brende, 1995).

In their book on adult survivors of trauma, McCann and Pearlman (1990) describe four ego resources that influence self-protection. One of these is "The ability to establish mature relations with others" (p. 142). They describe how supportive others can validate the survivor's worth, support her, and allow her the opportunity to feel useful as a friend.

Sharing a traumatic experience within a support system allows the victim to feel more reconciled and comfortable integrating the trauma story into his life (Burnell et al., 2006; Stern, 2009). For example, group trauma was investigated in an article about the reconstruction of a German church that was destroyed during World War II. The community was able to start rethinking their past—both the negative and the positive—after coming together and investing in their church's reconstruction (James, 2006). This is also an example of how an activity can help people process their trauma.

Support systems can also be effective within the context of treatment, when survivors work within a group setting (Arai et al., 2008; Burnell et al., 2006; Griffin, 2005). For example, in research with war veterans, trauma was best treated when the victim had the camaraderie of veteran groups. They felt safer talking about the trauma and creating new narratives through "mutual reminiscence" (Burnell et al., 2006). At the same time, the veterans found it helpful to be have "safe havens" away from the trauma, when they were at home with their families. These trauma victims benefited from two different types of social support—their veteran groups, whose shared experience allowed them to feel more comfortable speaking about their trauma directly, and their families, who were able to provide them with a sense of normalcy away from the trauma. This is, again, a connection to the experiences collectors have within their communities—many collectors have reported that their friendships are initially founded on common interest and become supportive over time (Belk, 1995).

Collecting has the potential to provide connections that ultimately develop into both friendship and support. As a collector becomes more interested in her hobby, she starts seeking out more information and more connections to various resources. Frequently, collectors become involved with larger collecting communities, with whom they talk about their collections and connect on a personal level as well (Belk, 1995; Pecoskie, 2006). In sum, both the trauma and the collecting literature place particular emphasis on community and connection.

Restoring a sense of order. Trauma is intimately connected with victims' world perspectives (van der Kolk, 2002). When a person experiences PTSD, she sees everything through the lens of her trauma, which diminishes her ability to process new stressors, to incorporate the trauma into her worldview, or to integrate her traumatic experience into her sense of self (van der Kolk et al., 1996). The trauma victim is able to recover if, instead, she finds a

way to make sense of what has occurred, and incorporates the traumatic experience into an updated understanding of the world and her position in it (Everly, 1995).

Similarly, McCann and Pearlman (1990) noticed that people were better able to cope if they had a sense of willpower, initiative, and the ability to strive for personal growth. In their book, McCann and Pearlman were referring to the qualities that lead to successful therapy. However, these qualities also hold some overlap with the research on how people use their collections.

Collecting scholars have theorized that people use their collections to feel like they can make some sense or order out of a piece of the world (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Storr, 1983). This would be especially useful after trauma, when the world feels particularly chaotic and difficult to predict or understand (Everly, 1995). This is also reflected in psychotherapeutic treatment for trauma, which includes a focus on restoring the client's feelings of control and helping her redefine her understanding of the world (Dörfel et al., 2008; Everly, 1995; Herman, 1997; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Similarly, in the study of resilience, Agaibi and Wilson (2005) found that internal locus of control was one of the most impactful protective factors. Collectors are able to create an environment of control through organizing their collections, evaluating the values of different pieces, and finding ways to display their pieces. This can serve to symbolically refurbish their sense of personal control (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Storr, 1983). This experience, while limited, can serve to remind collectors that order is achievable, and that they have some personal determination over it (Storr, 1983).

A sense of completion and empowerment. The research on trauma, coping, and resiliency revealed that people most benefited from strategies that increased their feelings of completion and mastery (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Burns, Marley, Bradshaw, & Domene, 2008;

Dörfel et al., 2008; Feder et al., 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Niiyama et al, 2009; Sachs, Rosenfeld, Lhewa, Rasmussen, & Keller, 2008). Psychotherapy for trauma victims has also focused on empowerment and a renewed sense of personal power (Herman, 1997, van der Kolk et al., 1996). People with a clearer sense of purpose were also shown to experience more posttraumatic growth (Feder et al., 2008).

Much of the coping research focuses on how people process very specific traumatic experiences (e.g., secondary trauma for the police officers in charge of investigating child exploitation cases; on-the-job trauma for hospital nurses; and Tibetan refugees' trauma after being displaced from their homes). For example, Dörfel, et al. (2008) chose to study motor vehicle accident survivors because they determined that motor vehicle accidents were one of the most common traumas for non-military people. I will briefly describe their study as an example of the empirical research on the effectiveness of trauma-related coping strategies that enhance a sense of completion and empowerment.

Dörfel et al. (2008) contacted 44 survivors of severe motor vehicle accidents that had taken place at least six months before the study. Participants were given an initial screening interview by phone, a packet of questionnaires by mail, and a 2-3 hour in-person interview. Participants completed questionnaires about the impact of the accident, as well as the presence and severity of PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, coping strategies, and posttraumatic cognitions. During the interview, they spoke about PTSD symptoms, accident severity, cognitive style, coping style, and other possible Axis I disorders.

The researchers found that specific coping strategies predicted the presence or absence of PTSD more successfully than looking at the objective severity of the motor vehicle accidents. After analyzing the results, Dörfel et al. (2008) determined that two of the best protections

against symptom severity were situation control and positive self-instruction. Situation control was defined as the ability to analyze a situation, make a plan for how best to respond, and then follow through with the response. They described positive self-instruction as the use of personal self-talk to encourage feelings of competence and mastery, as well as improving overall feelings of control. These two strategies reflect the need for personal empowerment within recovery.

Similarly, scholars have described collectors as people seeking a sense of completion or wholeness (Carey, 2008). It is challenging to complete a collection. However, the steps along the way are attainable and may help collectors experience mastery and confidence (Belk, 1995; Formanek, 1991). Collections also provide a sense of purpose and increased perspective (Carey, 2008). Overall, collectors experience better self-esteem throughout the process of collecting as they complete goals and develop a sense of accomplishment (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004). Simultaneously, they gain admiration and attention from fellow collectors, who are able to show a special appreciation for their efforts (Pecoskie, 2006).

Personal discovery of the link between the past and present. Trauma recovery and collecting also share an emphasis on personal discovery. After experiencing a traumatic event, the victim needs to reconnect with and understand her past (Herman, 1997). She needs to be able to remember and mourn what has happened, as well as integrate herself back into ordinary life. The more personally people are able to connect with their stories, the more likely they are to experience posttraumatic growth (Feder et al., 2008). People who know themselves and engage in their stories thoughtfully experience higher resiliency as well (Zautra, 2009).

In a similar vein, many of the collecting researchers and theorists have noted the personal connections made between people's collections and their personal histories (Caldwell, 2005; Colwwell-Chanthaphonh, 2004; Crispell, 1988; Muensterberger, 1994; Subkowski, 2006).

Sometimes these connections come from joyful memories, while other times they are derived from challenging times, such as war or a family loss (Subkowski, 2006). More generally, collections have been seen as an effective way for people to get to know themselves (Storr, 1983; Subkowski, 2006).

Trauma is sometimes too difficult for people to manage directly, so many therapists have chosen to approach it through metaphor (Stern, 2009; Subkowski, 2006). One focus in the treatment of trauma comes from forging a connection between the traumatic event and an aspect of current life experience (Brunell et al.; Lewis, 2004; Stern, 2009). It is possible that collecting could lend itself to the processing of trauma because it is a natural connection that people make between the past and the present.

Chapter 3

Methods

The goal of this study was to explore the connections between collecting and processing traumatic experiences. I chose to use interpretative phenomenological analysis because it allows participants to share a thorough description of their unique stories. IPA is a qualitative methodology that aims to understand and "give voice" to people's experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). In order to begin exploring this new area, I felt that it was important to use a methodology that was exploratory and respected the complexity of experiences. IPA allows for a thorough, in-depth exploration of an area (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This helped move this study from the theoretical level toward an understanding of people's felt experiences of the phenomenon. Using IPA, I conducted in-depth interviews and learned about participants' stories. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically in order to start describing how people experienced the connection between collecting and the processing of traumatic experience.

In IPA, the researcher becomes part of the interpretative process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA accepts that all human experience is filtered through individuals' constructed meanings: an event happens, the participant interprets it, and it is reported as a story that he has created. In order to understand the participant's experience, the researcher needs to use a discerning ear. She must be aware of her own biases and think about how they may impact her understanding. She also needs to interpret implicit meanings that come through participants' narratives (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, I have been thoughtful about my personal reactions throughout this process. My reactions are incorporated as part of the research.

Participants

Recruitment. This particular phenomenon has not been researched specifically. I wanted to hear collectors describe the connections they had seen. However, I needed to find collectors who had noticed this association in order to hear what their experiences had been. I wanted to include people who had some conscious awareness of their own experience of this connection and could speak about their process.

Participants were recruited from various collecting publications. I did this to increase the chance that they had a high level of commitment to their hobby. In order to participate in the study, participants were pre-screened via e-mail. This preliminary screening was to ascertain if potential participants were active collectors who had experienced a trauma and felt their collection was directly connected to their trauma. If so, they were asked if they would be willing and able to engage in an extended interview about their collection and its relationship to their trauma. They were provided with an informed consent form, a summary of the study, and an explanation of confidentiality. They were also told that they should only participate if they were comfortable with these parameters. Preference was given to people who could be interviewed in person, although most of the interviews took place by telephone.

The confidentiality of each participant was protected and respected throughout the study. This was especially important because of the sensitive nature of people's stories about trauma. Participants' identities were also protected when reporting the study results, although relevant historical events were kept in order to keep the context of certain experiences (such as specific wars). Each participant had opportunity to read over any portion of this project in which his or her experience was described. I agreed to alter or remove anything that made them feel uncomfortable.

Description of participants. Seventeen people contacted me by e-mail to volunteer (three women and fourteen men). I sent them each a personal thank you and a copy of the screening e-mail to see if they would be a good fit for the study. Nine people completed the screening e-mail (one woman and eight men). Of those nine, seven fit my criteria and were invited to interview for the project. I was ultimately able to interview six of them. Five of the participants were male and one was female. They were living in three different countries and, within the US, four different states. Five of the interviews were conducted by phone and one was conducted in-person.

I will begin by giving a basic description of each participant. These descriptions were reviewed by the participants, who determined how much personal information would be shared. The order is random, but they are referred to by their participant numbers throughout the paper. Table 1 references what each participant collected.

Participant 1 was a woman in her early seventies. She collected English Transferware. She described her collection as part of her recovery from a traumatic plane crash and debilitating spinal cord injury. During her interview her husband, also a collector, contributed additional information.

Participant 2 was a collector of ephemeral material. He specialized in magazines and biographical information about Norman Rockwell and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He described his collection as a way to cope with the challenges of being on the Asperger's Spectrum and feeling socially lonely.

Participant 3 collected subway tickets, tokens, maps, and signs; world coins and paper money; Catholic medals; Boy Scout paraphernalia; and Pennsylvania Railroad items, "among other interests." He said his collections began as a way to please his father, who was critical and

Table 1

Participant Collections

Participant	Collection(s)
1	Main: Transferware. Side collections: glass bottles, ice cream scoops, music boxes, Chinese figures, and antique pistols
2	Main: Ephemera. Specialties: Norman Rockwell, Franklin Delano Roosevelt
3	Subway tickets, tokens, maps, and signs; World coins and paper money; Catholic medals, Boy Scout paraphernalia; Pennsylvania Railroad items; "among other interests"
4	Coins, banknotes, and related ephemera
5	Main: Military-related numismatics and numismatic items with hands on them. Past collections: stamps, postcards, matchbooks, stickers, and political buttons.
6	Numismatic history of Southeast Asia

abusive. As a teenager, he was inappropriately approached by several men in leadership positions. He said this further cemented his connection to his collections.

Participant 4 collected coins, banknotes, and related ephemera. He began collecting when he was in his forties and was recovering from a debilitating illness that doctors could not initially diagnose. While confined by his illness, Participant 4 turned to an old shoebox with coins that an older cousin had given him when he was younger. He described his collection as a distraction at first—he decided to find out what these coins were at a time when no one seemed to know what disease he was facing. Ultimately, Participant 4's collection led him to a completely new direction in his life.

Participant 5 was a military doctor who served in Iraq. Although he had collected here and there earlier in life, he said his collecting took hold when he was deployed and needed to find something to take his mind off of the daily traumas he experienced. He later specialized in military-related material, including the pogs he used in Iraq.

Participant 6 was a Vietnam veteran who collected material from the history of Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. In his interview, he said his collection was part of a reparative effort after the damage of the war. He described this as a personal need and a national need.

Procedure

Participants engaged in a 1-2 hour semi-structured interview. All of the interviews were recorded in a private office on speakerphone (or in person) so I could later transcribe them.

Interview protocol and questions. The principles of IPA emphasize that interview questions are a guide, meaning that they help the participant tell the story, but should not be treated as a strict structure (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA also encourages the researcher to

explore new areas as they arise over the course of the interview. However, a basic structure is in place to help ensure that important areas are covered within each interview (Larkin et al., 2006). With this in mind, I prepared an outline of interview questions that focused on experiences of trauma, collecting, and the influence of collecting on trauma. I also wanted to make space for the participants to talk about the changes in their experiences over time. The questions were created using current research, discussion with collectors, and my personal experience as a collector.

I kept this outline out during the interviews so I could keep track of what areas had been covered. However, I found that most of my questions were answered organically over the course of the participants' narratives.

Questions about collecting in general:

1. What do you collect and when did you start collecting?
2. Who do you talk to about your collection?
3. What has kept you involved in collecting?
4. How has your relationship with your collection changed over time?

Questions about the experienced trauma:

1. Can you briefly describe the traumatic experience(s) you have been thinking about in the context of this study?
2. How did you initially react to your trauma?
3. How has your relationship with your trauma changed over time?

Questions about the interaction between collecting and traumatic experience:

1. In what ways do you think your collection may be connected to your traumatic experience(s)?
2. How did you realize your collection was connected to your traumatic experience(s)?

3. Were you ever surprised by a connection between your collection and your trauma?
4. How has your collection helped you cope with your trauma?
5. How has your collection made it more difficult to cope with your trauma?
6. How has the relationship between your collection and trauma changed over time?

Awareness of personal connections. In IPA, it is essential that the researcher recognize that she inevitably has biases (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I needed to be aware of my biases both before and during the analysis process. This was done in part to help me put my experiences aside and approach the research with an open mind. However, IPA also allowed me to consider myself an essential research tool. By utilizing my personal reactions, I could access deeper understandings of how the phenomenon exists in my participants' worlds (Clarke, 2009). Therefore, it was important for me to thoroughly analyze my personal connections to this topic and to consider how they created both problematic bias and useful perspective (Finlay, 2008).

I grew up around paper money collectors. I also became a paper money collector, which means I have a lot of numismatic friends and I attend several numismatic conferences each year. Thus, I had some preconceptions about collectors' relationships to each other and their collections. For example, I knew that my collecting peers supported each other around personal matters. This impacted my expectations about my participants' communities. On the one hand, it helped me be sensitive to the social aspects of collecting. On the other hand, I needed to remind myself that other collecting experiences deviated from what I had seen among my paper money collecting friends.

I also came to this study as a therapist, which meant I had already been exposed to a range of trauma and recovery stories. Specifically, I have worked with many victims of PTSD. I needed to be thoughtfully open to my participants' definitions of trauma. I also wanted to

incorporate my therapeutic stance into the interviews without transforming them into clinical intakes. I worked to ensure that the focus of the interview went to the interaction of collecting with recovery from trauma.

Finally, in the act of preparing for this study, I created further biases. I was influenced by all of the preceding material on the possible meanings collections could hold. For example, I expected participants to talk about social supports. I noticed that, during my first interview, I was looking for moments to talk about friendships within collecting communities, even before Participant 1 brought it in as part of her narrative. The act of testing a hypothesis tends to bias the researcher to seek supporting evidence. In this case, I needed to ensure that my pursuit of favored ideas and hypotheses didn't bias or overwhelm my understandings of participants' narratives.

The research I conducted also enriched my understanding at times because I could draw on my knowledge of the literature to enhance my exploration of a topic. For instance, when Participant 2 began speaking how his collection gave him a sense of completion, I was able to ask questions based on what the research literature said about completion. Thus, I was able to draw out further details about what finishing a part of his collection meant to him.

It was essential for me to keep my personal reactions in mind throughout the process. I wanted to hold back my preconceived notions so I could see people's experiences with a fresh, clear perspective. At the same time, I wanted to utilize the value of my personal experiences and the deeper insights they afforded me. Therefore, I kept a few notes about my reactions after each interview. These notes helped me utilize these two perspectives in order to attain a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences with collecting and trauma.

Data Analyses

Following the interviews, I transcribed and analyzed them using IPA. Although it is

impossible to fully understand the lives of participants, IPA helps researchers describe the phenomenon through the participants' narratives (Larkin et al., 2006). I read each transcript multiple times and moved continuously between my interpretations and the original text (Smith & Osborn, 2003). According to the methodology outlined in Smith and Osborn (2003), I began the analysis by reading through the first transcript on its own to get a general understanding of the material. The second time, I began to insert my reactions, observations, and impressions along the margins. Next, I went through it again, this time looking at the transcript and my notes to observe larger themes, as well as to choose quotations that captured these themes. I repeated this process for each of the remaining transcripts. As I completed each transcript, I communicated the list of its themes with the participant. This was done to ensure that I had gleaned themes that described each participant's experience with collecting.

After I had finished analyzing the transcripts individually, I met with my second reader to organize the themes into common threads and overarching themes, or motifs. At this point, I returned to the original transcripts to ensure that the theme clusters accurately described the original words the participants used. I created a table of the common threads and shared motifs, and provided appropriate quotations that exemplified them. In this way, I continuously connected the transcripts with each other and with my understanding in order to prepare a coherent description of the experiences of the collectors I interviewed.

Second reader. It is important for IPA researchers to be self-aware and thoughtful through the analysis. Part of this self-awareness requires that a researcher recognize that she may need an additional set of eyes to ensure that her interpretations are valid and that she is managing the influence of her biases. Therefore, I invited a peer, Ted Austin, as a second reader. He was uninvolved in the work itself and had no particular knowledge of the specific topic, although he

was also a candidate for a PsyD and was familiar with research procedures. I explained my methodology to him and provided him with copies of the transcripts and instructions about how to analyze them. Like me, he read and re-read the transcripts to identify themes. Through conversation, he also helped me notice areas where my biases may have interfered with my interpretations. He and I discussed the results together and determined a final list of thematic motifs, which are described in the next section.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

In qualitative research, the researcher is given the option of combining the results and discussion sections (Smith, 2003). As I prepared my analysis, it became clear that this option would allow for a smoother, more coherent description of the connections between the narratives of people's experiences and the extant literature, as well as the implications of this study for clinical work and future research.

I began by sharing my personal reactions and describing how my biases impacted my data collection. Next, I described how we determined themes from each interview. I also went through the common threads and motifs that were described across participants. I described the points of overlap between the participants' narratives and the applicable research on collecting, leisure, and trauma. I then described the limitations of the study, the clinical implications, and possible directions for future research.

Re-consideration of Biases and Personal Reactions

As part of IPA, I knew I needed to be self-aware as I went through each step of the research process (Finlay, 2008). In sitting down to put together the results section, I found myself feeling quite excited. I was pleased with how interesting the interviews were and how clearly I felt they had shown the power of collecting. However, a few days into the writing, it occurred to me that my biases were stronger than ever. At first, my impulse was to try to take a step back from the excitement to see what was really said. However, upon further reflection, I realized I needed to take a further step *in*. I then spent some more time pondering my reactions and what to do with them.

Personal impact. The process of finding participants was surprisingly challenging. I had

expected, based on the people I knew in the numismatic community, that collectors would be excited to be the focus of a dissertation. Therefore, when I met with disinterest, irritation, and even aggression, I felt disappointed. I then adjusted my advertising method. I was more forthcoming about being a collector myself. In my requests, I wrote directly to the people in charge of each club, and made the e-mail or letter personal so they knew I was not "spamming" them. I also explained the process more carefully so it was less scary (i.e., volunteering for an "interview" was less intimidating than volunteering for a "study"). I then found that I was getting more responses. Many of them were people who said they didn't qualify as a survivor of trauma, but that they were happy to hear about the project. This felt much more like the reception for which I had hoped.

The interviews themselves were very powerful for me. I enjoyed getting to know people from a broader range of collecting areas. I was struck by how quickly people welcomed me into their narratives. It seemed that my being a collector provided a level of intimacy—the same kind of connective power that allows collectors to find companions when they most need them.

I was also pleased to find that the interviews themselves felt quite organic. Most of the time, I was able to glean the information I needed simply by having a conversation about collecting and trauma. The most difficult interview was with Participant 5, because only moments before our scheduled call, I found out I was going to be an aunt. During the interview, I found that my attention was less focused. On reading the transcript I also noticed, in blatant connection, that I had asked more questions than usual about family relationships. It was impossible to withdraw my strongly happy, familial feelings from that evening.

This example is the most clear, perhaps, but I also found my feelings had snuck their way into many of the interviews. It was especially difficult for me to hear that Participant 3 had

experienced negative connections to his collecting communities. Although he was positive about the majority of his fellow-collectors, others had very seriously hurt him. My clinical side felt horribly about his story, but my collecting side wanted desperately to separate this piece out of his collecting narrative, and somehow affix it elsewhere. However, the goal of the project was to hear about people's true stories, not just their happy stories.

At the outset, I had occasionally worried that studying collecting might take away some of the joy in being a collector. Instead, I feel that it was embellished through increased appreciation for the act of collecting, for the support of my fellow collectors, and for their stories.

Surprises. As I began the recruitment process, I was struck by several surprises. First, I was quickly aware of how much the internet had impacted collecting communities. In order to advertise, I joined several online groups and list-servs. I observed many forms of conversations—some collecting-specific and others more about life in general. There were also a lot of rules within each online community's culture: what is okay to post, what isn't, where different topics are posted, and who has what status. They expressed themselves through comments, pictures, emoticons, avatars, quotations at the ends of their posts, and allegiances to particular sub-groups. For several of my participants, the internet has meant significantly increased social activity. It has allowed them to be as "in touch" as they choose because it is an easy form of connection, yet it provides a safety buffer on days when it is too difficult to be social.

I was also surprised by how candid the participants were in speaking about their experiences and traumas. Overall, they seemed proud of how much they had accomplished, particularly in collecting. Most of the participants also sent me additional information later—

books and articles they had written, photos, blogs, invitations to conferences, and connections to other collectors.

In each interview, I wanted to make space for participants to speak about positive and negative aspects of collecting. While they readily discussed positive aspects of collecting, they were not as forthcoming about negative aspects. Further, negative aspects of collecting were typically presented in a joking manner, such as Participant 4 laughing at how his non-collector partner found collectors to be "strange." Below, I have presented a few possible explanations for participants' hesitance in sharing more negative aspects of collecting.

First, many of the participants wanted to legitimize collecting. They wanted people to see collecting as beneficial, and therefore may have been hesitant to discuss the less savory sides of collecting. Second, the bulk of this study was retrospective. I asked participants to think back about their traumatic histories and talk about how collecting impacted them over time. It is possible that, as they summarized the past, the positive pieces of collecting came to the surface more than the negative. Third, this was a self-selected population. When I recruited people, I was looking for participants who felt that collecting had helped them through their trauma. Therefore, the population had an inherent positive bias for collecting.

The analysis process was striking to me as well. Working with a non-collecting second reader (Ted) was helpful for me in noticing what Participant 1 would call "collector speak." There were moments from the transcripts that made complete sense to me but seemed odd to Ted. He and I had several conversations of what constituted "normal," both within and outside the collectors' world. I found that our disparate experiences with collecting provided valuable perspective as we compared our themes.

This project was and is personal. There is inherent risk in studying something you care

about. Therefore, at various times along the way, I was nervous about the study—would my committee find it compelling? Would anyone participate? Would the results support this idea I had posited? And if the participants contradicted my expectations, how would I feel toward my own collecting? However, as I began conducting the interviews, I felt more and more positive. I was moved by the participants' strength in both confronting trauma and telling their stories. They deepened my appreciation for this phenomenon, survival, collecting, and collectors.

Analysis for Themes, Common Threads, and Motifs

This study was designed to discover how collectors used their collections to process traumatic experience. I approached this phenomenon through four exploratory questions. First, I was curious about the explicit connections collectors had made between their collections and their traumatic experiences. Second, I wanted to hear how these connections had changed over time. Third, I wanted to learn about the intentionality behind the connection—how consciously had they chosen to turn to collecting as a means of processing the trauma? Fourth, I was interested in hearing about any retrospective meanings that they had placed on their collections. In order to answer these four questions, I wanted to hear the participants' narrative descriptions of their experiences.

Ted and I read through the six transcriptions to see what themes emerged from the participants' descriptions. He and I completed our analyses independently, as described in the Methods section above. I then e-mailed each participant his or her individual themes. Because IPA is supposed to describe the participants' experience (Osborne & Smith, 2003), I wanted to ascertain whether the participants felt that these themes were accurate. This process resulted in one minor word-change. Otherwise, all six participants said the themes we had noticed were representative of their experiences.

Next, I took all of the themes and transferred them onto note cards. I used a different color pen for each participant and labeled each card with either a "T" for the themes my colleague found or an "R" for the themes I found. My co-reader and I then got together, read through all of the themes, and sorted them into groups according to similarity. We found fifteen theme clusters, which we categorized as "common threads." A common thread had to appear in multiple participant interviews. We labeled the common threads according to content. We then further grouped the common threads into five major theme clusters, which we labeled as "motifs." All five motifs were described by all of the participants. The five motifs are: Personal Empowerment; Connections with Other Collectors; Connections with Family; Representation within Collecting; and Using Collections to Actively Manage Trauma. In Table 2, each motif is listed along with its corresponding common threads. I also indicated which reader(s) noticed each common thread, and which participants described them.

I have described the motifs below, along with the common threads that comprise them. I illustrated the motifs by including descriptive quotations and stories from the interviews. Many of the common threads and motifs allied closely with material from the literature review, which I incorporate into my discussion as well. The only motif that was absent in the original literature was "Connections with Families." In Table 2, I have listed the motifs with their common threads, as well as the corresponding themes from the literature.

Table 2

Motifs, Common Threads, and Parallel Themes

Motifs and Common Threads	Reader(s)/Participant(s)	Parallel Theme(s)
1. Personal Empowerment	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Positive self-perception (leisure research); empowerment (trauma research)
A sense of pride	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Sense of completion (trauma research and collecting research); empowerment (trauma research)
The excitement of a challenge	T, R / 2, 3, 5, 6	Biological explanations for collecting (collecting research)
2. Connections with Other Collectors	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Social supports (trauma research and leisure research)

Motifs and Common Threads	Reader(s)/Participant(s)	Parallel Theme(s)
Friendship and connection	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Community (trauma research, leisure research, collecting research)
Mentors	T, R / 4, 5	
Giving to others	R / 2, 6	
3. Connections with Family	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	
4. Representation within Collecting	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	
Representations of trauma in the collected items	T, R / 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Traumatic healing (trauma research)
Affection toward collected items	T, R / 1, 2, 4, 5	
Representation of the collector in his or her collection	T, R / 1, 2, 4, 6	Insight and perspective (trauma research)
5. Using Collections to Actively Manage Trauma	T, R / 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	
Distraction/escape	R / 1, 2, 4, 6	A distraction from stress (leisure research)

Motifs and Common Threads	Reader(s)/Participant(s)	Parallel Theme(s)
Regaining a sense of control	R / 1, 3, 4, 6	Restoring a sense of order/structure (trauma research, leisure research, collecting research)
Transformation from bad to good	T, R / 1, 5, 6	Insight and perspective (trauma research)
Restoring a sense of self	T, R / 1, 4, 5, 6	Discovery of links between past and present (trauma research)
Life, death, and collecting	R / 1, 5, 6	

Personal Empowerment

This first motif appears relatively intuitive, but it is nonetheless important. We found that people were collectors because collecting helped them feel good. Trauma can devastate a person's sense of self. In contrast, the collectors I interviewed were empowered and moving, as Participant 4 pointed out, "from strength to strength." This motif was derived from two common themes: first, the times when participants related feeling a sense of pride; second, their descriptions of excitement around facing new challenges. Overall, this motif illustrates a sense of empowerment, which is considered essential for trauma recovery (Herman, 1997, van der Kolk et al., 1996). These common themes are presented in Table 3, along with descriptive quotations.

A sense of pride. All six participants described feelings of pride around their collections. Their successes in collecting renewed a sense of personal capability. They also described how nice it felt to complete a collection or master the knowledge they needed to do so. Participant 2 described the excitement of completing something: "You felt great pride in your stamp albums when you made that last stamp on the page to make it complete." This echoed the research on trauma and coping, which suggested that the most effective coping strategies were those that increased people's feelings of completion and mastery (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Burns et al., 2008; Dörfel et al., 2008; Feder et al., 2008; Niiyama et al, 2009; Sachs et al.,2008).

All of the participants also touched on the pride of becoming experts in their fields. Successes in the field of collecting helped them feel respected and appreciated. Participant 3 captured this feeling: "You can be treated with respect by older people and younger people and

Table 3

First Motif: Personal Empowerment

Common Threads	Examples
A sense of pride	"And my collection has grown and grown and now I have, what [my husband] calls a 'world class collection'" (1).
The excitement of a challenge	"…he told me it was probably too difficult for me to collect…What? I can do anything I set my mind to!! I was hooked" (6).

accepted as not being really weird!" Participant 1 spoke with particular pride about the books she had written. Her books drew attention to her expertise as a writer and researcher.

The participants were able to enjoy their successes in the collecting field. They gained confidence from their collections and the contributions they made to their collecting communities. Similarly, in experiments with trauma victims, general experiences of mastery led to mastery with trauma (Dörfel et al., 2008; Stern, 2009).

The excitement of a challenge. We identified this thread in the transcripts from participants 2, 3, 5, and 6. For them, collecting was an exciting new challenge. Participants experienced a lot of satisfaction from proving that they could solve problems for themselves. The process of discovery helped prove collectors capable, even despite the inevitable powerlessness of traumatic experiences.

The achievement of managing a challenge can inspire a sense of ability (Formanek, 1991). For Participant 6, this connection re-enacted the importance of feeling in control. He described this connection quite poignantly in his narrative: "But I still love to acquire a new piece! The challenge to find a new one is, again, very much like the challenge I had to find the right intelligence and create the exact report and map overlay needed by my men, friends, and brothers during the war." During the war, meeting a challenge helped him feel empowered and useful—and helped him feel like he could survive. Later, he found that same energy through his successes in challenges around collecting.

The participants enjoyed the process of learning the history of, as well as acquiring new pieces for, their collections. Although the participants were interested in owning valuable pieces, they sometimes seemed to describe more joy in the process of finding them. They found additional challenge in the effort to research and understand the specific history behind their

collected items.

Connections with Other Collectors

Collecting also provided the participants with connections to new people. All six participants spoke explicitly about this aspect of collecting. Similarly, social connection was seen as one of the most important protective factors in managing trauma (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski, Kraaij, Schroevers, & Somsen, 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Schroever & Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & van der Hart, 1996). In the research, trauma victims healed better when they had a supportive community (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Brende, 1995; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski et al., 2008; Schroevers & Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Therefore, this motif represents an important overlap between collecting and recovery (see Table 2). Within this motif, we found three common threads: friendship and connection; mentors; and generosity. I will describe each thread below, with some examples from the participants' transcripts. These threads are also represented in Table 4.

Friendship and connection. This common thread was found in all six interviews. Participants described how closely connected they were to the people within their collecting fields. For many of the participants, community was something they were missing in other parts of their lives. All of the participants described a progression from initially meeting people to becoming good friends with them. They also depicted how close they felt to other collectors—even when separated by large geographic distances. For many of the participants, technology

Table 4

Second Motif: Connections with Other Collectors

Common Threads	Examples
Friendship and connection	"Banknotes, banknotes have got me a lot of friends over the years. You know" (4)?
Mentors	"He stumbled upon me and encouraged me… And suddenly, I discovered he was nominating me for… awards" (4).
Giving to others	"So my friend collects x, I buy it for him... I just enjoy having people… get things they like" (2).

made a difference as well. It provided a way to be connected while protecting a sense of privacy at the same time.

For the participants, these safe community connections were stabilizing because they provided a chance to feel cared about, comfortable, and supported. At other times, the connections were helpful because they allowed the participants to feel less lonely. This was especially important for people who had geographical, social, or physical limitations that otherwise kept them from connecting with others. For example, Participant 2 explained, "You know, I'm not the world's most socially most apt individual, if there is such a word… And [collecting is] a way of getting accepted into society as well."

Another shared experience was one of mutual respect. Within the collecting community, participants were able to feel important, knowledgeable, and worthwhile. Participant 5 described this experience of feeling equal: "Uh, you can talk to 'em. I mean, not many places I feel that you can go up, you can talk to the people at the top, who wrote the definitive book on it, and sit down and have a conversation with them. Uh, and feel comfortable with it." This was especially powerful for those who felt like they weren't perceived as equal in other parts of life.

Ultimately, these connections led some of the participants to feel like they could confide in the friends they had made through shared interests. As Participant 3 said, "it's more comfortable speaking with somebody who's a collector, or at least has an interest." In parallel, when trauma survivors can share their personal experiences with supportive people, they are more likely to effectively integrate their trauma stories into their lives (Burnell et al., 2006; Stern, 2009).

Mentors. The second common thread was one of mentorship, which was described by all six participants. Mentors were described as people who provided knowledge and direction in a

kind, caring manner. There was a lot of emphasis on the importance of learning and feeling like collecting connected them to people who could teach, help, and lead them. Participant 4 described how a mentor relationship pushed him back in many positive ways: "He encouraged me in my writing, he got me into [a collector's journal]. He linked me up with… editors… I was beginning to get, to acquire a bit of information, some knowledge, and... encouraged and pushed me, for which I am eternally grateful." Mentors were, in many instances, the most important friends within the collecting community.

In some cases, like that described by Participant 4 above, mentors pushed the participants to take further steps in their collecting: attending conferences, writing articles, giving talks, and being recognized for awards. In the context of trauma, this thread speaks to the impact of an improved sense of competence and mastery (Dörfel et al., 2008; Zautra, 2009). In order to make connections between trauma and how it impacts daily life, victims find support systems that can help them regain a sense of control (Burnell et al., 2006; Herman, 1997; Lewis, 2004; Stern, 2009; van der Kolk et al., 1996). In the participants' experiences, this process began by finding a supportive mentor-figure. For several of the participants, it was even more empowering to later become mentors as well. They saw the role of educating others as an important piece of being a collector.

Giving to others. Many of the participants highlighted moments when they enjoyed acting generously. They said that giving to others helped them feel more positively about themselves. For Participant 2, this experience was an empowering contrast to his social challenges. Collecting gave him the chance to further connections to other people. It also helped him demonstrate his kindness. For example, he summarized: "…now I go to shows, I might buy for other people. Say, 'Oh!' So my friend collects x, I buy it for him…I collect and now I… just

enjoy having people… get things they like." Rather than going to shows for himself, he enjoyed being thoughtful on behalf of his friends.

Participant 5 and Participant 6 both described times when military experiences were changed through their generosity. For them, collecting reenacted times when helping other people was necessary for survival. Participant 6 described his desire to help soldiers during the war and how he now uses the same energy to help new collectors: "Each time I had a traumatic experience, I become more determined to live through it and go on with my life, to include numismatics, after the war. And to also teach the new men arriving in-country what was really going on and… also to survive the war." During the war, Participant 6's generosity helped new soldiers survive. After the war, Participant 6 used the same munificence to encourage new numismatists as they navigated conferences and clubs.

Connections with Family

Each participant described some connection between their collections and their family. The relationships between family and collecting often began at the start of collecting and provided a continued source of connection. This motif is of particular interest because it was not specifically mentioned in the literature on trauma, coping, or leisure counseling. However, for the six participants in this study, it was an area of emphasis. It is summarized in Table 5.

All six participants described positive ways in which their collections kept them connected to their families. Within the narratives of positive family connections, there were two core ideas. First, collectors were able to keep hold of positive connections from before their traumatic experiences. These connections were protective as the participants faced challenges later in life. Second, collections were a way of helping the participants connect to their families during and after their traumatic experiences. This was especially important because trauma has

Table 5

Third Motif: Connections with Family

Examples
"Actually I was in England. I was eight years old, with my parents. My father gave me a stamps box, and he had been a stamp dealer, an amateur stamp dealer during the depression, so he had a suitcase full of stamps, so… It was interesting, and that, that was my first collecting experience. *Sigh.* And then he used to, uhm. Uhm. Support my hobby. By, used to go to the post office and buy stamps" (2).
"And [my wife] supports it very much so. And, uhm, as I said. She's right now messing on ebay for me. Some of the, these cherry pick rarities she's done, I mean, God, she found them" (5).
"And my daughter—who is coming up later tonight—is trying to get us organized, so I'm sharing a lot with her, because she will be inheriting my collection some day, and she says, 'I don't have any idea what it is!' I'm trying to put some things together for her, and we've been doing a lot of talking about it" (1).

the potential to lead to isolation. However, these participants utilized their collections as a conduit for connection.

Four of the participants started collecting because of a family member. For example, Participant 5 recalled, "I inherited it from them… they were supportive of it, and… after I got into it, guess what I got for birthdays and Christmas?" When collections come from a positive origin, they later hold an important connection to earlier, better times. Collecting later, during, or after difficult times can then draw the person back to the pre-trauma self (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

Several participants said that they chose to collect something that was directly related to their families. For example, Participant 3 chose to collect railroad material because he knew his relatives had worked for the railroad. He said this was "probably the most positive part of my collection." In order to learn more about his railroad items, Participant 3 spent a lot of time talking to his mother about family history. In his and other cases, the content of the collection helped cement closer bonds with family members.

While deployed in the military, Participant 5 and Participant 6 utilized their collections to stay connected to family. In the midst of daily atrocities, their collections served as symbols of their wish to return home safely. For example, Participant 6 sent material home to his mother, who kept his collectibles in a footlocker, awaiting his return. It was helpful for both Participant 5 and Participant 6 to stay connected and to plan ahead for projects they would complete upon their return.

There were also several depictions of how collecting fit into married life. Most of the participants were either married or in serious relationships. They described their collections as a way to connect to their partners, particularly after trauma might otherwise leave them wondering

what to talk about or how to communicate.

Most of the participants also described their collections as a positive connection to future generations. Following a life-threatening trauma, collections seemed to provide a sense of legacy. For example, Participant 1 described her daughter's relationship with her collection: "I'm sharing a lot with her, because she will be inheriting my collection some day, and she says, 'I don't have any idea what it is!' I'm trying to put some things together for her, and we've been doing a lot of talking about it."

Overall, the positive family connections represented a link between the participants' collections and their families in the past, present, and future. Their connections prior to their traumatic experiences provided a layer of protection. During their traumatic experiences, participants utilized their collections to remain connected to their families. After traumatic experience, they felt that their collections re-connected them to family members. They also planned into the future for how their collections would create a legacy for future generations.

Although all six participants experienced positive connections to their families, Participant 3 also described how family connections could hold a negative connotation. His relationship to his father was complicated by their shared experiences with collecting. His narrative illustrates how collecting re-enacted and, ultimately, helped him overcome family trauma.

Participant 3 found that his successes in collecting were a way to prove himself to his abusive father: "My father… wasn't a, uhm, 'You're doing a good job!' type of comment father. It was, 'You can do better.' It was, uhm, 'You better do it my way or, or, uhh… uhh… there'll be consequences." He went on to explain that collecting was a way he was able to make his father proud of him. Therefore, his collection grew out of mixed feelings—he yearned for positive

connections to overpower the fear and anger he otherwise felt. His narrative demonstrates how strongly collections can connect to past trauma. It also illuminates how complex collecting connections can be.

Symbolism and Representation

As we were sorting through participant themes, we found three common threads that shared a theme of symbolism, in which the collectors seemed to be using their collections to represent other connections in their lives. Ted and I labeled this motif "Symbolism and Representation" to capture three different types of representations: representations of trauma in the collected items; affection toward collected items; and representation of the collector in his or her collection. These themes are also outlined in Table 6.

Representations of trauma in the collected items. Almost all of the participants (2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) described ways that their collections were representative of their traumatic experiences. They also observed that these connections had, at times, taken them by surprise. Although collecting was frequently described as an "escape," the participants realized that their collections were often deeply rooted in trauma. One vivid example came from Participant 6: "I also recently acquired a Lao note from… the first battle where they used tanks against us. Our men had only light arms and nothing to knock out the tanks. Out of a dozen or so men, only three or four survived and escaped into the jungle and back to another American base. It is a fantastic numismatic piece, but I gave it to the Special Warfare Museum on Fort Bragg to put in their exhibit about that battle and away from me." Participant 6's description shows how deeply painful his experiences were. It also shows the vulnerability behind his collecting.

Table 6

Fourth Motif: Representation within Collecting

Common Threads	Examples
Representations of trauma in the collected items	"There are pieces in my collection that can be tied to the traumatic experiences of my comrades. When I look at them, I often remember those men" (6).
Affection toward collected items	"And I love to look at 'em! It's just great, they're everywhere. I can't imagine living with my collection shoved in a box. I just can't" (1).
Representation of the collector in his/her collection	"Well, like our friend Franklin Roosevelt. Very, very lonely guy. Very strong mother figure, as I had. Uhm, and uh… he oh, you saw what, you saw what [she] said: he always had his stamp box with him" (2).

For a few of the participants, the collections were quite bluntly related to their traumas. These participants were also the most vivid in describing the symbolism behind their collecting. They said they had embraced hobbies that were connected to traumas to prove that the traumas couldn't destroy them. The participants found that collecting often led them to process their experiences more deeply. Participant 3, for instance, observed that his many collections were connected to his many traumatic experiences: "So here I have these collections where they're in each area, you know, …where there, there's been these really bad experiences underlying." Collecting became an integrated part of the trauma narrative and story.

Affection toward collected items. Similar to the connections between collectors, many of the participants conveyed affection toward the collections themselves. In several instances, this suggested an almost living quality to the collected items. For example, both Participants 2 and 5 were only children who spent time with their parents abroad. They explained that their collections served somewhat as a substitute for the siblings they lacked.

The participants also conveyed affection as they described how they organized and displayed their collections. For example, Participant 4 almost sounded as though he were going through family photos as he described his paper money album: "Being able to discuss the whole thing on a page, so it just wasn't a piece of colored paper sitting in a page, each one was written up. 'Do you remember this?' 'Hey, that's nice.'" Much like family albums elicit reminiscing about family events, these albums apparently evoked the stories of his banknotes.

Representation of the collector in his or her collection. The narratives also captured collecting as a form of self-expression. The collectors saw their collections as integral parts of themselves, so it was important for them to be thoughtful about how and when they shared their collections. For some, this meant an open, eager sharing. For others, there was a more protective,

private approach.

The participants also said their collections had helped them get to know themselves better. They found that collecting led to self-exploration and increased insight. At times, the participants chose to describe their collections in place of speaking about themselves. For example, at times when Participant 2 seemed reluctant to speak about himself, he used displacement by describing the lives of famous collectors who shared some of his challenges and characteristics: "Well, like our friend Franklin Roosevelt. Very, very lonely guy. Very strong mother figure, as I had. Uhm, and uh… he oh, you saw what, you saw what [person from e-mail] said: he always had his stamp box with him." His collection provided him a link to a historical figure, through which came increased self-understanding.

Participants 1 and 4 both reported that their complex medical challenges left them feeling like anomalies. Participant 4 described his frustrated bemusement at being a medical mystery. Participant 1 said her approach was to embrace being in a wheelchair and looking "different." As two people who felt "unusual," they seemed especially entranced by collectibles that they perceived as unique. Both Participant 1 and Participant 4 described their collections as "quirky," keeping them connected to other collectors, yet representing their sense of difference.

Using Collections to Actively Manage Trauma

The fourth motif centers on how the collectors actively used their collections to manage trauma. This theme cluster holds the most common threads. These ideas closely echo specific techniques that therapists utilize in treating victims of trauma (see Table 2). The five common threads are: Distraction/Escape; Restoring a Sense of Self; Regaining a Sense of Control; Transforming Bad to Good; and Life and Death. They are also described in Table 7.

Table 7

Fifth Motif: Using Collections to Actively Manage Trauma

Common Threads	Examples
Distraction/escape	"It prompted me… it gave me something to do. It took my mind off my situation" (4).
Regaining a sense of control	"So, ahm, I was actually starting to use numismatics to completely turn my life around. Ah, and that is more or less where you find me today. I have gone from strength to strength" (4).
Transformation from bad to good	"My writing about Vietnamese numismatic pieces and their history is helping to preserve Vietnamese history" (6).
Restoring a sense of self	"Nothing works really well, so I had, and I'm in the wheelchair, so I… and I had therapists coming to the house, uh, for therapy and I finally said, 'I don't want to do all this entirely, I don't want my entire life to be therapy, I really want to do something that I really enjoy'" (1).

Common Threads	Examples
Life, death, and collecting	"About two months before he died, he had a very bad stroke, and he had discharged himself from the local hospital. He had gone down to his little storage area and the next thing, I received in two very badly wrapped parcels in the post a complete type set of [coins] that they were his bequest to me. And, ah, he died soon after" (4).

Distraction/escape. Most of the participants described turning to their collections, at least at times, in order to avoid the stress of thinking about trauma. Collecting served as a distraction when it was too difficult to deal with the challenges at hand. As described by Participant 5, "I call it my 'mental health treatment.' It just took me out and, you know, just got me to a whole 'nother' little world." As described in the leisure research, at times it is helpful to get one's mind away from stress (Hutchinson et al., 2003; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Trenberth & Dewe, 2005).

Four of the six participants said they began collecting because they needed an escape from trauma. Although the other two participants were collecting prior to their traumatic experiences, they both reported that they turned to their collections the most when they felt the worst. In several instances, the participants exemplified this during their interviews. At times when the discussion got difficult, they would delve into the details of the collection itself to move away from talking about the trauma. Like Herman described, distraction is important early on in the processing of trauma (1997). Similarly, most of the participants transitioned from needing their collections as distractions into using them to actively overcome challenges.

Regaining a sense of control. Van der Kolk (2002) described the importance of helping trauma victims restore a sense of control. Several participants described ways in which their collections helped them feel that they could at least control one aspect of their lives. Participant 4 exemplified this common thread because his biggest challenge was his utter lack of control over his medical complications. Numismatics provided a challenge over which he could attain more personal mastery.

There were also several descriptions of how organizing one's collection provided a sense of control, order, and enjoyment. Participants 1, 4, and 6 described their joy in arranging and

displaying their collections. These descriptions highlighted how much the participants savored the experience of owning the items in their collections. Organizing a collection can be an opportunity for creating structure, an experience that leisure counselors recommend for people who are feeling powerless (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

Transformation from bad to good. Participants 1, 5, and 6 described using their collections to reframe something negative into something positive. Sometimes this was about seeing beauty in unexpected places (like a dealer's "junk box."). Other times, they experienced positive personal change. Parts of the self were moved from "bad" to "good" through collecting. Participant 6 expressed how powerful this conversion was for him: "When I am asked about why I am working so hard on so many Vietnamese numismatic projects, I tell people that I want to build something good in Viet Nam instead of destroying parts of the country and some of its people. The Vietnamese understand that we each did what we had to do for our countries and that we should put the war behind us and build a better future." Helping Vietnam was part of his personal recovery. He needed to help Vietnam in order to feel more at peace himself.

Restoring a sense of self. Most of the participants (1, 4, 5, and 6) described collecting as a way to feel like themselves again. Following a traumatic event, it is helpful to re-connect to the pre-trauma self (Juniper, 2005). It was also described as a way to steer life back in a positive direction. As Participant 4 concluded, "I was actually starting to use numismatics to completely turn my life around."

The literature emphasizes a return to normalcy. This connection acts as reassurance that the self can go back to being stable again. In leisure counseling studies, this was seen as especially important, particularly for recovery from physical injury (Hutchinson et al., 2003). When the world is continuously labeling a person as "different," it can be helpful to feel

"normal" again.

Life, death, and collecting. Participants 1, 4, and 6 described ways that their collections were intimately connected with life and death. These narratives highlighted their need for meaning and connection in the face of existential threat. This extremely strong relationship was not covered by the literature, but was noteworthy in its presence during the interviews.

One powerful example came up as Participant 1 described the trauma of her plane crash. Earlier that day, she had picked up some antique glass bottles for her husband's collection. She recalled this memory from just after the accident: "And as they were taking me out of the plane and putting me in the ambulance to take me to the hospital, and I said, 'Don't forget that package behind my seat!' There were two bottles and we still have them." Participant 1 turned to collecting even in the immediate aftermath of her accident, when it was unclear whether she would live. The bottles represented her hope in that moment—she wanted to survive and use them—they represented the future.

Overlaps Between the Participants' Experiences and the Research

The collectors I interviewed were forthcoming about their experiences. They helped me to better understand this phenomenon. Through their narratives, I also observed a lot of overlap between their experiences and the researched treatment for trauma (see Table 2). I will summarize these similarities below.

Personal empowerment. The research suggested that trauma victims could benefit from a sense of completion and mastery. People who had a sense of situational control and who could talk themselves through problems were less likely to develop PTSD (Dörfel et al., 2008). Previous trauma studies emphasized personal power as a focal point in therapy (Herman, 1997, van der Kolk et al., 1996). They also noted that having a sense of purpose led to increased

post-traumatic growth (Feder et al., 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Similarly, the participants spoke about empowerment. They said that they felt like they had a regained sense of control, which helped with both their recovery and for their general enjoyment of life. After experiencing a trauma, all six participants placed collecting as a high priority because they said it provided them with a direction and sense of purpose. They described it as grounding.

Connections to other collectors. In the research, social supports were seen as protective both in preventing PTSD and in treating trauma (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Brende, 1995; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski et al., 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Schroevers & Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Similarly, the participants described how helpful their collecting communities were for them. To some degree, they spoke about explicit help and support from fellow collectors. They also depicted the general value of belonging to a community.

Using collecting to actively manage trauma. Three of the participants came to collecting after experiencing a trauma. The other three participants were already collectors at the time of their trauma, but focused more on collecting after their traumatic experiences. None of the participants had explicitly chosen their collections in order to process their traumatic experience. Rather, they had all noticed that their collections were helpful to them along the way. They were all able to describe many interactions between trauma and collecting.

The research also described the importance of making sense of the trauma and the world in which the trauma was able to occur (van der Kolk et al., 1996). The recommended treatment for trauma incorporates the restoration of power and improved internal locus of control. Power and a sense of control were also seen as protective traits in the prevention of trauma (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Feder et al., 2008; Garnefski et al., 2008; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Schroever

& Teo, 2008; van der Kolk, 2002; van der Kolk et al., 1996). This point of overlap within the trauma literature was also a common thread among the participants. They described the value in having control over their collections, how they displayed them, and how much they could learn about them. They noted how chaotic their traumatic experiences were in contrast to their collections, over which they held more influence.

The research highlighted people's ability to process trauma by reconnecting the past with the present. In particular, trauma victims sought to understand themselves over time. Introspection helped them strengthen themselves and learn how to fulfill their psychological needs (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). This led to a better understand of the current self as well as higher resiliency in the future (Herman, 1997; Zautra, 2009). Many of the collectors I spoke with described these important links over the lifespan. They spoke about how they had changed, but also about moments when they felt restored to who they had been before the trauma had taken place. There was also recognition of where they had come from and all of the progress they had made in working through their trauma. They openly thanked collecting for helping them reach this healthier, more processed point.

Divergence from the literature. The participants' experiences with family illustrated a departure from the literature. All six participants said their collections connected them to their families. However, the literature gave very little attention to how collecting related to family. While the literature mentioned that collecting could be a possible mourning tool for lost family (Subkowski, 2006) or a way to process trauma at a distance from family (Burnell et al., 2006), the participants much more strongly endorsed the idea that collecting provided rich opportunities for deeper communication and connection with family. It is hard to know why there is such a disparity. It is possible that these connections are unique to people who fit this particular

phenomenon. However, it is also possible that past studies have not asked about family. This highlights the importance of a qualitative approach for this kind of study. I wanted participants to tell their stories and, therefore, learned that family was a central part of each story. This specific piece warrants further study in and of itself.

Overall Impressions and Implications

At the start of this study, I wanted to explore four questions. I wanted to hear what collectors had to say about their experiences with collecting. I was especially interested in the healing aspects of collecting, and how intentionally people turned to collecting after traumatic experiences. I have repeated my initial questions below. Along with each question, I have summarized what my participants taught me.

What connections exist in participants' narratives about their traumatic experiences and their collections? The six participants described a number of connections between their traumatic experiences and their collections. Some participants described an explicit connection between the content of their collections and the experience of their trauma (such as a veteran collecting material related to the war). All of the participants described feeling helped by the social connections their collections brought them. Along these lines, they also described direct connections between their families and their collections. Each participant also shared how their collecting had provided a sense of renewed confidence. Finally, almost all six participants made specific references to how collecting was part of their "mental health treatment."

This was a core question of the study. I had casually observed this phenomenon, and I wanted to know if other collectors had as well. These six collectors described not only their own use of collecting, but how their friends experienced healing through their collections. It was satisfying to hear that this study struck a chord in many collectors. They were excited to have

someone interested in the collectors as well as the collections. This topic has continually struck chords with my colleagues, friends, and family. These suggest to me that the phenomenon holds some importance to psychology.

How did participants' relationships with their collections change as their understanding of their trauma evolved? All six participants described how their collections built over time. Participants 1 and 4 both contended with traumatic, life-threatening medical conditions. In the midst of their hospital visits, they each turned to collecting as a distraction. However, ultimately they both described how collecting became the focus of their lives. It replaced their feelings of hopelessness with feelings of empowerment.

Participants 3, 5, and 6 were each actively collecting during ongoing traumatic experiences. These three interviews described how the interaction with the content of their collections evolved over time. All three had collections that were explicitly related to their areas of trauma. At first, they collected in these areas out of convenience and availability. Ultimately, however, they each described the powerful experience of collecting something related to their pain. Initially, they used their collections to survive their traumatic experiences. Later, they engaged with the content of their collections to process their traumas. They also used their collections' content to connect with other people who shared common backgrounds.

Thus, all six participants engaged more in their collections concurrent to processing their trauma over time. Ultimately, collecting became central to their lives and their survival stories. As they worked through the trauma, they became more richly involved in their collecting and collecting communities. In some ways, their participation in this study represented another step—their decision to share their story.

To what extent did participants consciously use collecting as a way of working through traumatic experiences? For the most part, the participants in this study described initially turning to collecting as a distraction rather than a way to process trauma. They found collecting to be more and more engaging over time. They each described surprise at the impact of their collecting, not only on their traumatic memories, but also on their lives as a whole. The participants were cognizant that collecting had served a dual purpose; it provided them with an escape and, later, it facilitated long-term improvement in their post-trauma lives. Thus, what began as a conscious effort to get away from the trauma transformed into a conscious effort to overcome the trauma.

All six participants made references to collecting as "therapy" or "mental health treatment." In fact, two of them said this was the reason they were attracted to the study. However, none of the participants described initiating their collections in the explicit hope that it would help them process their trauma. Rather, they discovered its therapeutic benefits along the way.

What kinds of retrospective meanings did participants discover over time? At the time of the six interviews, the participants' traumatic experiences were many years in the past. This meant that they were able to reflect upon the significance of their collections over time. They each described surprise at how the significance of their collections had changed.

All six participants also spoke about the meaningful connections they had made. They described being struck by how deep their connection to their collections had become. They also determined that collecting was now an integral part of their identities.

The participants showed a strong capacity to reflect on their development as collectors. In the beginning, none of them anticipated how important their collections were going to become.

Many of them spoke especially about the helpful mentors they met along the way—people who helped them with their collections and helped them feel important. They all spoke about how much it meant to be part of a group, to experience continued personal growth, and to feel successful as a resource to other collectors.

This study was retrospective. It was purposefully limited to people who felt they had overcome their traumatic histories. In fact, their participation was a testament to how much their collections meant to them. They were proud of themselves for surviving. They were also grateful for the help along the way. Their experiences led them to welcome other people into collecting. All six have ways that they reach out within their communities. Their participation in this study was a chance for them to reach out further, into the larger arena of psychology.

Limitations of the Study

While my interviews contained a great deal of depth, I was limited by the small sample size. I only know about the experiences of the six people I interviewed. Also, the process of recruiting proved to be complicated, which may have skewed who ultimately volunteered. I posted ads through journals, newsletters, list-servs, and online groups. In each case, there was an administrator who served as a gatekeeper and decided whether and when to publish my request. Some groups were very inviting and actively encouraged members to participate. Others worried about my intentions and were tentative.

In planning for the study, I had also hoped to meet people who collected in a variety of areas. However, more numismatists volunteered for the study, perhaps because they knew my name within the numismatic community. Therefore, I found that a lot of the potential participants collected coins or paper money, often among other things.

The process was also limited because the candidates were located all over the world.

Thus, most of the interviews had to be conducted over the telephone. I wonder whether they would have been even more fruitful had we been able to meet in person.

A final limitation came from leaving it up to the participants to describe what they saw as "traumatic experiences." This resulted in a wide range of trauma stories. The participants' reactions were very different because their traumas were heterogeneous. In some ways, I feel that this added breadth to the investigation. However, I also noticed that additional depth came from being able to compare similar experiences (i.e., Participants 5 and 6 both being in the military). It leaves me wondering what more might come from a study that focused on a particular type of trauma more exclusively.

Directions for Future Research

It is important to acknowledge that all of my participants came to use their collections to help heal on their own, without professional intervention. It seems that some of the power in their experiences came from their having discovered them without external assistance. That being said, all six participants said that participating in the study was powerful for them. They expressed appreciation at being heard. I also found that the conversations contained a great deal of depth. This suggests that there is value in collectors having a chance to talk about their experiences. Thus, therapists might talk to trauma victims about their collections or other hobbies in order to work through the trauma metaphorically. In particular, trauma survivors may benefit from a therapist helping them recognize their successes in collecting, potential connections to collecting communities, the symbolism of the collected materials, and the ways their collecting may bridge the gap between their past and future selves.

For this study, I interviewed a non-clinical population. On the one hand, this shows how much healing took place without therapeutic interventions. On the other hand, it means that

future research could also seek out collectors who are in treatment to see how it could be utilized clinically. Similarly, future research could incorporate therapists' experiences utilizing collecting in treatment. This would feel more useful in thinking toward a clinical model.

In another direction, I found it quite noteworthy to compare participants with similar trauma histories. Participant 1 and Participant 4 both suffered from medical traumas. Similarly, Participant 5 and Participant 6 had both served in the military. In each case, their stories shared similar themes. A study of people with similar traumatic experiences could enrich some of the analysis. It may also draw out some more specific direction in terms of treatment.

Clinically, this study suggests a powerful alternative to traditional therapy for trauma. The participants described an organic implementation of many recommended therapeutic interventions. This may also say something about a natural propensity toward living healthfully. Although the participants didn't set out to deal with their traumas through collecting, they did gravitate toward a rich, symbolic method of doing so. Future research could utilize collectors' experiences to illuminate more about how people process trauma and experience post-traumatic growth.

The Significance of the Study

This study holds significance because it studies a phenomenon that was not previously researched. I had personally observed and wondered about the connection between collecting and the processing of traumatic experiences. I spoke with six people in depth about their experiences. Through these initial interviews, I was able to document that this phenomenon exists. I also discovered something that the related research did not predict: family can have a very powerful relationship to people's collections. This study is an important starting point toward further research and understanding. I hope that it will bring attention to some of the

valuable sides of collecting, especially this intersection with working through trauma.

Final Reflections

About a month ago, I went to one of my yearly collecting conferences. This one involves a group of about 60-70 people. We come together because we are all interested in the numismatic history of military conflict. Each spring, we take over a small hotel in Ohio. We fill the weekend with our collections. There are dealers' tables, an extensive educational program, several competitions, some elements of military re-enactment, an auction, and many opportunities for conversation.

Each year, my fellow collectors ask, "Are you finished with the dissertation yet?" They have been encouraging me throughout the process—even before I decided to focus on collecting. This year, I had already completed the bulk of the analysis, and I was in the midst of exchanging final drafts with my advisor. When I told them I was almost done, they asked me if I could share a bit about what I learned. Therefore, when my "show and tell" time came up, I gave everyone a basic summary of my results.

I was surprised by the group's reaction. The room was filled with raised hands. Some people shared stories about their own experiences. Some people asked questions about how trauma is defined. Some people worried about the less healthy sides of collecting, such as hoarding. Finally, the moderator had to step in so we could move on to the next presentation.

Throughout the rest of the weekend, I had fellow collectors speaking to me about their personal experiences with collecting. I was touched by their candor. I was also excited to see that the results of the study had struck a strong chord with my peers. Their reactions gave me confidence in the importance of this study. I felt very privileged to have this opportunity to talk with collectors in my community. Instead of only focusing on our collections, we were able to

engage in conversation about the act of collecting as well. This experience helped solidify my belief in the importance of this project. I hope that it will lead to further research into the power of collecting.

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Appendix A

Sample Advertisement Letter (to *Coin World*)

I have been a numismatic collector most of my life. I collect coins, paper money, and friends. I have been long been struck by the stories I have heard from fellow collectors. These stories helped inspire my dissertation, which looks at the benefits of all kinds of collecting.

I spent a long time trying to decide what aspect of collecting was most important to me. Ultimately, I decided to combine my interest in collecting (and collectors' stories) with my growing curiosity about how people manage difficult life experiences and traumas. At this point, I have done a great deal of research, designed a study, and received support from the Internal Review Board at my school (Antioch University New England). I am extremely excited to begin interviewing people!

If this resonates for you—if you feel like your collection has helped you through particularly challenging memories or experiences—then I would love to hear more. I will be conducting interviews this fall, and I am eager to learn about how collecting has helped and changed other collectors. I have set up an e-mail address for this study, and can be reached there at any time: StoryCollecting@gmail.com. Thank you!

Appendix B

E-mail Screening

Thank you for your interest in this project. I am trying to understand how collecting has been helpful for collectors. In particular, this is a study of how people use their collections to cope with trauma and challenging life experiences. I will be interviewing collectors to hear their stories. This should be a comfortable experience, so please don't volunteer if you are uncomfortable speaking about your history, or if you are concerned that it may be harmful for you to speak about it.

If you choose to participate, you will be sitting with me (or speaking by phone) for 1-2 hours to talk about your experiences. Your confidentiality will be prioritized and protected at all stages of this project. Your interview will be transcribed and read by me and then read by a second reader. We will be using the themes from these interviews to try to better describe some of the ways people use their collections.

As I hear that people are interested in participating, I like to find out a little bit about them, in order to make sure this is a good fit. Below you will find some questions about you and your experiences. Please fill them out and e-mail them back to me. I will be in touch to speak with you about scheduling. In the meantime, thank you again!

Location (city and state only):

Best way to be in touch with you:

When did you begin collecting?

Briefly, please tell me what you collect:

Also briefly, please describe the general nature of the difficulties and/or trauma that your collection has helped you manage. (**For this preliminary form, you do not need to worry about describing it in too much depth. Please try to limit your response to 1-2 sentences at most. There will be time in the interview to describe this more fully.**)

Do you anticipate any risks or concerns in speaking about your experiences in an interview? If so, please describe them here.

Finally, please let me know if you have any questions, particularly if they would be helpful for you in deciding whether or not to participate in this study.

Thank you again!

Ray

Appendix C

Informed consent form

Project Title:	Collecting Away Their Suffering: Meaningful Hobbies and the Processing of Traumatic Experience
Principal Investigator:	Ray Feller, M.S. Doctoral Student Department of Clinical Psychology Antioch University New England 40 Avon Street, Keene, NH 03134
Telephone:	(617) 734-3443, ext. 169
E-mail:	storycollecting@gmail.com

Thank you for your interest in this research study. My name is Ray Feller, and I am completing my doctorate in clinical psychology at Antioch University New England. As part of my training, I am writing a dissertation on how people use their collections to process traumatic experiences.

I have read books, articles, and interviews about both collecting and trauma. This project will explore how people work through trauma. I am interviewing many collectors to hear their stories and to learn about how their collections have helped them through difficult times. If you choose to participate, you may find it beneficial to describe your healing process. This project may also help future trauma victims by providing insight into how collecting can be helpful in processing challenging experiences.

The results of this project may be used in a variety of educational forums: professional presentations, articles, and other purposes related to the field of psychology. Primarily, my goal is to advance my own professional development and personal understanding of this phenomenon.

This form is to inform you of your rights as a participant and to ensure that you understand what your position in this project entails. Please read over the following points carefully.

1. Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty.
2. This study does not intend to create any risk for you as a participant. You will be asked to share stories about being a collector and about experiences with trauma that you feel you have already processed. However, the act of recalling trauma can create a variety of reactions. For some people, it can be a positive experience because it can help solidify understandings about the past. Others may feel some discomfort in talking about past challenges. You may notice that you feel emotions like sadness or anger. At the extreme, there is a risk of feeling as though the trauma is happening to you again. If there are any points at which you feel uncomfortable or vulnerable, please feel free to let the

interviewer know that you need to take a break or end the interview. You are not obligated to explain why you want to stop, and there will not be any punishment for leaving. Referral to mental health assistance will be made available as necessary.

3. Your anonymity in this project is of the utmost importance. Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. All of your materials will be marked with a code number rather than your name. All written materials and presentations will include pseudonyms instead of names. Under pseudonym, your quotations and stories may be used to help illustrate themes around collecting. You are welcome to review any material that quotes or references your experiences. If you would like to have this opportunity, please inform the primary investigator, Ray Feller.
4. If you have any questions about any aspects of this study, you may ask them at any time before, during, or after the study. You may contact the primary investigator, Ray Feller, at (617) 734-3443, ext. 169 or via e-mail at storycollecting@gmail.com.
5. If you have questions regarding the research process or your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Kevin P. Lyness, Chair of the Antioch University Human Research Committee, at (603)283-2149.

Thank you for helping to further understanding about collecting and how it can help people work through traumatic experiences!

I have read the information provided and agree to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Printed name

Appendix D

Project Description and Confidentiality Statement

Project description.

Thank you for your interest in this project. This is a study of how people use their collections to cope with traumatic life experiences. I will be interviewing collectors to hear their stories. If you choose to participate, you will be sitting with me for 1-2 hours to talk about your experiences. Your confidentiality will be prioritized and protected at all stages of this project. Your interview will be transcribed and read by me and by a second reader. We will be using the themes from these interviews to try to understand how collecting can be used when dealing with trauma.

Confidentiality.

Your privacy is extremely important for this project. Other than your informed consent form, any other materials will use a code rather than your name. Only I will have access to the list of names and corresponding code names, which will be stored in a locked file cabinet. In the final report, I will also alter dates whenever possible, in order to further protect your confidentiality. However, the chronology of relevant historical events will be retained to keep the context of certain experiences (such as specific wars or major terrorist events). You will have the opportunity to read over any portion of this project in which your experience is described. I will alter or remove anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.