Winter 2007

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Sara B. Marckett
Iowa State University, sbb@iastate.edu

Jennifer Yurchisin
Texas State University - San Marcos

Susan J. Torntore
Iowa State University

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Disciplines
Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Graphic Design | Industrial and Product Design | Other Arts and Humanities

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The Process and Meaning of Collecting Ethnographic Textiles

Sara B. Marcketti\textsuperscript{1}, Jennifer Yurchisin\textsuperscript{2}, and Susan J. Torntore\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Lecturer, Textiles and Clothing Program, Apparel, Educational Studies, and Hospitality Management Department, Iowa State University, 31 MacKay Hall, Ames, IA 50011-1120. Email: sbb@iastate.edu

\textsuperscript{2}Lecturer, Fashion Merchandising Program, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666. Email: jy15@txstate.edu

\textsuperscript{3}Assistant Professor, Textiles and Clothing Program, Apparel, Educational Studies, and Hospitality Management Department, Iowa State University, 31 MacKay Hall, Ames, IA 50011-1120. Email: sjtornr@iastate.edu

Abstract Consumption is one way individuals effectively deal with their feelings of anomie, or social instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values, in contemporary, postmodern society. Through the purchase and use of particular products, consumed objects create or produce personal identities. A specialized form of consumption, collecting, in this case ethnographic textile collecting, plays a key role in the quest for self-authentication and community in contemporary Western culture. In this paper, twelve collectors of ethnographic textiles were interviewed to better understand the manners and meanings of collecting as a specialized form of consumption. The collectors of ethnographic textiles used their collections as a way to both express their personal identity and become part of a larger community of textile collectors. Arnould and Price's (2000) theoretical model of authenticating acts and authoritative performances guided the analysis of the spoken word of the collectors interviewed.
Introduction

Academic interest in collecting behavior has increased over the past three decades because the amount of collecting behavior has been on the rise (Martin 1996). Collections of traditional collectible items (for example, dolls, plush toys, figurines, baseball cards, die-cast sculptures) can be found in an estimated 40% of United States (U.S.) households (Unity Marketing 2002). In addition to these traditional items, people in the U.S. also collect a variety of other types of goods, including ethnographic textiles. Textiles refer to any woven, felted, knitted, or otherwise interlaced material made from flexible, fibrous substances (Figure 1). Ethnographic textiles are defined in this paper as the physical components of dress, household items such as bedding, wall hangings, and floor coverings, and ceremonial objects used by non-Western groups both as cultural and ethnic markers (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992). The collections of objects categorized as ethnographic by Westerners has a history that runs parallel with that of cross-cultural contact. According to Brown (1998, 1), “the rationale behind the creation of those collections has received scant attention in museological literature.” It is not the intention of this paper to describe the ethnographic textiles themselves, but rather to analyze the manners and meanings of collecting as a specialized form of consumption. Although some research has been done on the collecting of textile products, in general, little is known about collectors of ethnographic textile products, in particular (Brown 1998; Frost 2000). The motivations behind their collecting behavior and the meanings they associate with both the process of collecting ethnographic textiles as well as the textile products remain unknown.

Perhaps one of the reasons why individuals collect ethnographic textile products is a result of the sense of “societal normlessness,” or anomic, they experience within contemporary, postmodern society (Chang and Arkin 2002, 390). Researchers (Martin 1996) have suggested that collecting, when conceptualized as a form of consumption, may be a behavior that people use as a means of defining themselves as individuals as well as a means of connecting with others, thereby reducing the anxiety and stress that is associated with feelings of social instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values (Rosenbaum and Kuntze 2003). The collecting of ethnographic textiles may be another consumption-related activity in which individuals engage to relieve the stress associated with anomic. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the behavior of collectors of ethnographic textiles. In particular, we were interested in exploring the meanings that the collectors associated with their behavior and their collections. To accomplish this goal, interview data from twelve collectors were analyzed using Arnould and Price’s (2000) framework, which conceptualizes consumption behavior as a series of authenticating acts and authoritative performances.
Figure 1. Bogolonfini Mud Cloth from Mali, Africa with African masks. Collection of Jonathan and Sarah.
Literature Review and A Priori Themes

Consumption in Postmodern Society

According to Arnould and Price (2000, 141), one’s sense of self is “situated in a social space.” Examining the similarities and differences that exist between one and others is fairly simple in societies with fixed social structural systems in place (Corrigan 1997). However, in contemporary, postmodern society, “this fixity has become loosened, and indication of class has been replaced by a more individualistic indication of lifestyle” (Corrigan 1997, 179). Contemporary, postmodern U.S. society is characterized by the “de-territorialization” of social institutions as well as physical time and space (Seidman 1994, 2). One’s place within society is no longer a given, and instead, postmodern theorists argue that social life, as each individual actor understands it, is constructed by those individual actors (Firat 1994). Thus, rather than merely locating one’s position within some pre-existing social structure in order to understand who one is as a person, one must create a unique place for himself or herself within society.

This conceptualization of contemporary U.S. society is initially appealing because it empowers individuals in relation to the existing social structure. Within postmodern society, individuals are allowed to assume power and control over their lives because they are free to create meanings for themselves that are independent of the meanings created and imposed upon them by others within society (Nava 1992). At the same time, however, this conceptualization of contemporary U.S. society is disturbing because this creative freedom may cause some individuals to feel that their lives are in essence, meaningless (Berger 2005; Reed 2002). In postmodern society, individuals may not know what to do in order to create individual identities, let alone any semblance of a collective identity with others in society.

Consumption is one way individuals effectively deal with their feelings of anomie in contemporary, postmodern society. Through the purchase and use of particular products, consumed objects create or produce personal identities (Firat 1994; Nava 1992). While some authors believe consumption frustrates identity construction, others argue that consumers embrace buying as a way to restore a sense of personal identity (Firat 1994). Individuals use their consumption behavior to form identities because consumer products have meanings attached to them that transfer from the products to the owners or users (Berger 2005; Reed 2002). Although acts of consumption may be fleeting moments, they can provide powerful confirmations of the self (Arnould and Price 2000).

In addition to creating personal identities, individuals in postmodern society have used consumption behavior as a method for forming communities and a sense of collective identity. Since the 1960s, Americans have become less involved with their communities. This shift from a focus on community interests to a focus on individual interests can be attributed to many factors, including technological advancements (for example, individualized entertainment in the form of television
as opposed to group forms of entertainment, such as the theatre); broad economic changes in the ways in which we live (for example, dual-career families as opposed to single breadwinner families); and where we live (for example, living far removed from our friends and family members) (Putnam and Feldstein 2003). One of the ways in which individuals can become involved with other people and to build a sense of community is through consumption. Researchers have found that groups of people have come together to form communities based upon their usage of particular types of products (Thompson and Troester 2002) as well as particular brands of products (Muniz and O’Guinn 2003). In this sense, consumption behavior has become a key feature of contemporary society.

**Authenticating Acts and Authoritative Performances**

Arnauld and Price (2000) have identified two consumption techniques used by individuals to cope with contemporary Western society and to attain self-fulfillment. These techniques, authenticating acts and authoritative performances, refer to how cultural products, in this case ethnographic textile collections, are mediated and how they acquire meaning in the consumption context. Authenticating acts define the construction and affirmation of personal identity and authoritative performances tie individuals to communities who share like values.

Authenticating acts are “self-referential behaviors actors feel reveal or produce the ‘true’ self” (Arnauld and Price 2000, 140). Consumption behaviors that serve as authenticating acts can result in several outcomes—individualization, differentiation, flow, peak experience, and peak performance. When an authenticating consumption act results in individualization, the individual committing the act feels special or unique. In order to accomplish this feat, the individual may try to consume products that are unusual or that are otherwise associated with a sense of individuality. The uniqueness of the products consumed “rubs off,” so to speak, on the individual, thereby asserting his or her individuality with respect to others within society.

Another outcome resulting from authenticating consumption acts is differentiation. There is a limit to the individualization one person can achieve through the use of mass-produced products, even if they are associated with individuality within a society. In order to effectively differentiate oneself, or demonstrate that one is unlike everyone else living within the same society, it is sometimes necessary to create an individuated or appropriated meaning for these commodities. In these cases, “people imbue commodities with personalized meanings linked to life narratives” (Arnauld and Price 2000, 51). Hence, the use of a particular product whose meaning has been reassigned by the individual user to fit with his or her life experiences serves to differentiate that user from other product users who have not had similar experiences. Over time, people imbue commodities with personalized meanings linked to their own life narratives.
A third outcome associated with authenticating acts within the consumption realm relates to feelings of flow, peak experience, and peak performance (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Arnould and Price 2000). Flow is “the unity between thought and action,” peak experience is “intense joy,” and peak performance is “superior functioning” (Arnould and Price 2000, 146). At times when consumers completely lose themselves in the experience of searching for, creating, or using a particular product, they feel they are in touch with who they are as individuals. In these moments, consumers believe they discover personal characteristics of self. Thus, the characteristics associated with the products become a part of the consumers’ authentic postmodern self. In this way, consumption becomes authentic act.

In addition to the creation of personal, individual identities, consumption behaviors also allow people to create a sense of collective identity. Arnould and Price (2000, 151) refer to these consumption activities that “focus on creating and sustaining shared traditions and connections between individuals and community” as authoritative performances. While authenticating acts of consumption display the ways in which an individual is uniquely individual and unlike other members of society, authoritative performances demonstrate the ways in which that same individual is similar to other members of society. In this way, “identity emerges from community” (Arnould and Price 2000, 151). Individuals are actively working to avoid the loss of a collective sense of place and meaning in the world; they are avoiding the de-territorialization that is endemic in contemporary society. Authoritative performances focus on creating and sustaining shared traditions and the connections between individuals and community. Participation gives performances their authoritative voice and achieves community for those engaged (Arnould and Price 2000).

Authoritative consumption performances may result in four outcomes—integration, membership, security, and community. Effective authoritative performances offer integration among participants, a collective sense of identity, and the security and feelings of community that flow from this integration. Researchers have demonstrated that individuals engage in authenticating acts and authoritative performances in several consumption arenas, including river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), skydiving (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993), Thanksgiving dinner (Weldendorf and Arnould 1991), and adventure experiences (Sharpe 2005). Although it has not yet been investigated, it seems likely, based on previous research concerning consumption acts that collecting is another consumption arena in which authenticating acts and authoritative performances occur.

Collecting Behavior in Postmodern Society

Collecting plays a key role in the quest for self-authentication and community in contemporary Western culture as it has been noted as a strategy for the deployment
of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity (Clifford 1988). The urge to collect objects is a part of the human social anatomy as it is a "strategy of desire" whose task is the ever-impossible effort to bridge the gap between expression and experience (Steward 1984, 139). Artifacts, the primary data for the study of material culture, are the evidence that allows us to subjectively and affectively study other cultures in a way unachievable through written records alone (Prown 1992). By undertaking cultural interpretation through artifacts we make contact with others' sensory experiences (Prown 1992).

According to Prown, "What is significant about the adoption of alien objects is not that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use" (Prown 1992, 67). The act of collecting selects, gathers, and detaches objects from their original locations and gives them enduring value in a new arrangement (Baudrillard 1994). Objects undergo a metamorphosis when they are collected. Everyday things are transformed—they are managed and valued in modes that are radically different from those of the objects' past (Brekenridge 1989). As the meaning of objects differs from maker to consumer, the collecting of cultural items, "shuns closure . . . and instead opens its eyes to existence, the world around us, both cultural and natural, in all its unpredictability and contingent complexity" (Elsner and Cardinal 1994, 5–6).

Within the past three decades scholars have considered the behavior of collecting particularly as it is related to culture and postmodernity. According to Martin (1996), postmodern collecting places individuals in a more psychologically secure time and structure of a past society. The collectors’ relationship with their objects can provide an alternative environment in which postmodern stress and anxiety are relieved. Martin stated that it is perhaps the potential threat of a future devoid of the familiarity of objects and material reference points that caused the popularity of collecting. McCracken (1988) discussed the idea of the extended sense of self that collecting provides. According to McCracken, collections communicate ideas about an individual that might be socially unacceptable to express aloud. Collections become part of who the collector is and what the collector represents. Therefore, it seems likely that collecting is a special type of consumption behavior that allows individuals to create and present a version of them that can be used to relate to others within contemporary society.

The purpose of our research was to better understand the manners and meanings of collecting ethnographic textiles as a specialized form of consumption. Our research was guided by the following questions—why do individuals collect ethnographic textiles? What special techniques do the collectors use when amassing their collections? What meanings do their collecting behaviors hold for them? To address these questions, interviews were conducted with twelve collectors of ethnographic textiles. The data collected were analyzed thematically using Arnould and Price’s (2000) model of authenticating acts and authoritative performances.
Method

During 2004, the lead author interviewed a purposefully selected sample of ethnographic textile collectors in the Midwestern United States. Purposive sampling was utilized for this study as it maximized the acquisition of relevant information and aided penetration of the research setting (Miles and Huberman 1994). Interviews were conducted in the informants’ homes or offices and lasted between 3/4 to 2 hours. The goal of the semi-structured interviews was to explore the topic of ethnographic textile collecting openly, allowing informants to freely express their own ideas and opinions within the structure imposed by the interview schedule. The interview schedule contained forty questions to address why these individuals collected (for example, What motivated your desire to first begin this collection? What are the benefits to you from this collection?), how these individuals collected (for example, Describe the process of acquiring several of the items in your collection. What criteria do you employ for making a specific purchase?), and the meanings they attached to their collections (for example, What role do you see your collection playing in your life? How is the collection an expression of your self?). Before each interview the informants were provided with the interview schedule and were asked to think about a particular textile object in their collection with special meaning. With the informants’ consent, all interviews were audio-taped. To further increase data validity, informants were sent a typewritten copy of the transcript and asked to confirm its precision. After reviewing the transcripts, theme analysis was used to extract themes from data. In this study, the authors were less concerned with universal truths than evoking the lived experiences of actual people.
Results

Demographic Characteristics of Ethnographic Textile Collectors

Interviewee demographic profiles are presented in the table on the next page. Of the twelve informants in this study, ten were affiliated with universities or colleges in the Midwestern United States, in the academic fields of textiles and clothing (five informants), anthropology (three informants), and art and design (two informants). The remaining individuals were a retired nurse who had taken an interest in home economics while in college and a retired social worker. Two of the ten academicians were retired from their professional careers yet remained active in academic research, publishing, and grant writing. At the time of the interviews, years of collecting experience ranged from 6 to 60 with an average of 27 years collecting experience. Each of the informants collected a variety of materials, examples of which included ethnographic textiles, Native American art, glass pieces, fine art pieces, folk art, pottery, basketry, ceramics, family heirlooms, masks, and historic clothing. Ethnographic textiles collected included flat pieces of cloth, dyed and embellished pieces, clothing items and accessories, items for the home such as pillows, rugs, wall hangings, and ceremonial items. Geographic areas of ethnographic textile collecting included Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Eastern Europe, India, and South East Asia. Eleven of the collectors were women; one informant was a man. Seven of the twelve informants were married; Jonathan and Sarah were the only married couple who were both interviewed.

Authenticating Acts

Individualization. The idea that ethnographic textile collections could be representations of the people who owned them was evident in the informants’ interviews. The informants stated that their collections were expressions of themselves and communicated to others their interests and their passions. According to Marcy, a textiles and clothing professor,

This collection is certainly an expression of me. I really like meeting and interacting with people from different cultures. I’m very comfortable with the unknown and going into a foreign environment and learning how to settle in. The textiles are a representation of my appreciation of cultural diversity and of the incredible work of the human hand that is often only found by traveling into remote, hard-to-reach areas of a country.
Demographic Information of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnographic Textile Collecting Interest</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Years Collecting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>Quilts and African textiles</td>
<td>Retired nurse</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan and Sarah</td>
<td>Native American, Central, and South American textiles</td>
<td>Retired anthropology professor and social worker</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy</td>
<td>African, Asian, and South East Asian textiles</td>
<td>Textiles and clothing professor</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyssa</td>
<td>African and Asian textiles</td>
<td>Textiles and clothing assistant professor</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>African textiles</td>
<td>Retired anthropology professor</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raelyn</td>
<td>Central American, Eastern European, and South East Asian textiles</td>
<td>Retired textiles and clothing extension specialist</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>South American textiles</td>
<td>Anthropology assistant professor</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Indian textiles</td>
<td>Art and design assistant professor and visual artist</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LouAnn</td>
<td>African textiles</td>
<td>Textiles and clothing academic advisor</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaclyn</td>
<td>South East Asian textiles</td>
<td>Retired art and design professor and visual artist</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Mexican and Central American textiles</td>
<td>Textiles and clothing academic advisor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The power of the collection to express aspects of one’s personality was also reflected in both Jonathan’s, a retired anthropology professor, and Raelyn’s, a retired textiles and clothing extension specialist, quotes:

To me it is an expression of my life, and my interest in cultural diversity and people from foreign cultures. People walk into a house and say ‘you can tell that you are an anthropologist.’ And I never thought of that as peculiar, but my father was a lawyer, you couldn’t walk into his house and say ‘oh you are a lawyer.’

I do handwork so I have this appreciation of it and I enjoy that. That shows my interest. I love design complexity. This gets into the humor part. I just got these Indonesian batik table linens. As I started look-
ing through them I know why I picked them. While most people would look for a matched set, I looked for 6 napkins that were different. And then 6 placemats that were different. That shows my interest in complexity, variations, and so forth.

Individuality or uniqueness was one personality trait the collections expressed to others. For some of the collectors, items contained within the collection were unique and according to the informants, these distinctive textiles also communicated to others that, they, the owners, were special individuals. Patty, an assistant professor of anthropology stated,

When people come into my house they remark about the unusual pieces that I have. People give me other cloth items and textiles that they have acquired. People are aware of it.

For Sherry, an assistant professor of art and design and a visual artist, the fact that she has acquired pieces that are currently rare and may soon become obsolete made them unique.

The roghan is an unusual piece. The reason I wanted a roghan was there were only 4 people working on this technique. I was really intrigued that, as a process that has gone on for hundreds of years it is becoming virtually extinct.

In addition to the uniqueness of the individual items contained within the collections, the personality of the collector also was expressed through the collection as a whole. Informants like Raelyn indicated that her collection was unique because the individual items that comprised the collection were not part of other peoples’ collections. The diversity of Raelyn’s collection is indicated in the following statement.

I collect ethnic textiles, and it is a very broad collection. They can be new or old pieces, used pieces, clothing, accessories, for the home, and traditional textiles. They can be flat, clothing, dolls. My Christmas tree is basically ethnic textiles.

_Differentiation._ In order to differentiate their textile collections from others, the informants spoke of their interest in collecting textiles related to their individualized experiences. Of the informants affiliated with Midwestern universities and colleges, each expressed an interest in ethnographic textiles that grew out of professional teaching and research responsibilities. As the academicians traveled to distant lands for research trips, they amassed a great diversity of textile products, forming unique
and incomparable textile collections that represented their individual self-narratives and histories.

The importance of the textiles to self-narrative also was evident when informants discussed the relationship of their collections to other family members. Here, we see how collections serve as a link from past to present to create a unified sense of self. Many informants mentioned that their love of textiles was inspired by a family member from the past. Thus, their current sense of self is linked to the past. For example, LouAnn, a former interior designer and current textiles and clothing academic advisor stated,

I have always had an interest in textiles even at a young age because my great grandmother was a seamstress and she had a lot of fabric and I loved looking through the fabric drawers and digging around and I loved to touch things.

While their ethnographic textile collections linked them to people and events of the past, informants also indicated that they used their collection to relate to people and events in the present. Several of the informants mentioned the sense of joy they received from collecting with family members. Marcy mentioned the fond memories and "strong connections" she shares with her husband and son concerning journeys taken together and the remembrances in the form of textiles from these trips. Sam, a textiles and clothing academic advisor, stated that collecting textiles represents an opportunity to enjoy life through a mutual passion with her husband.

Collecting is the one thing that my husband and I definitely share in common. He's a scientist. I am more of an artistic person. Traveling and collecting textiles is one thing that we both enjoy and can experience together. Our collection is an extension of our relationship and how we feel about art.

Flow, peak experiences, and peak performances. Generally, collecting has been recognized as benefiting quality of life through feelings of mastery, competence, or success as well as contributions to the collectors' sense of the past (Belk 1995). While many of the collectors mentioned the above-stated reasons as benefits of collecting, a prevailing theme was a true sense of enjoyment with the textiles themselves as well as the process of collecting. According to Lyssa, an assistant professor of textiles and clothing and museum curator,

I love surrounding myself with ethnographic textiles, with the feelings of those pieces, with the colors, with the textures, with the patterns. They truly have a physical presence and sort of an aura. Some of them
just glow! I have a favorite summer bed spread that just makes me happy to look at in the summer. I receive a lot of enjoyment from the textiles. There is the aesthetic experience as well as the pure enjoyment with the pieces.

Jonathan discussed the joy of discovering new pieces.

When we walk through markets we just try to restrain ourselves. They have the most dazzling colors and beautiful techniques. We usually case the area and go back and look at something again. Deciding on an item to buy is both emotional and analytical. I know things about the technique of design. But I could not say that it was not emotional, because I feel a real joy just seeing this object of beauty.

Raelyn mentioned the thrill of the hunt:

I do have an antenna that goes off! I am drawn to color, fine handwork, aesthetic appeal, and some cases, if it has been used, the purpose for which it was made. Often it is an emotional feeling that I like it very much and would like to have it. There is a rug in the living room that was an adventure. Some of the acquisitions are adventures and that makes them fun, too.

Informants spoke of the joy of “knowing” when to purchase a piece as well as satisfaction that their purchase could be continuously enjoyed, both for the product, the adventure of finding the textile, and later, when the textile was examined in greater depth and sometimes researched. The process of acquiring objects and researching them is spoken of by Jonathan,

The more you read the more you understand. I took some pottery classes and that made me much more aware of different types of pottery, things that I did not even know about. Then, when you know more about it, you want to have an example or two.

Authoritative Performances

Integration. The collecting of ethnographic textiles illustrated both the integration of the self with others and the integration of various aspects of collectors’ sense of self. These informants spoke of their collections as important learning and teaching tools that allowed them to connect with other individuals in their classrooms. Marcy stated that she began her collection with African textiles because she knew she was headed for a university teaching career where they would be important
for teaching. Sherry, Patty, and Jonathan all stated that pieces from their collection have played a pivotal role in curriculum development. Sherry commissioned an artist in India to create the stages of the tie-and-dye process on cloth for a lesson on resist-dyeing in her art and design courses; Patty spoke of introducing students to textile arts in the same manner as flat two dimensional, “high-art” paintings; and Jonathan started collecting baskets as a textile art as a consequence of teaching sophomore-level archeology “technique laboratories”. In these ways, the ethnographic textile collections served as a conduit for sharing of textile knowledge within the academic community, as well as allowing the collection owners to connect with students and other members of the community.

Additionally, the informants indicated that their ethnographic textile collections allowed them to integrate various aspects of their identity, particularly their scholarly interests with their personal interests. According to Jonathan the demarcation between his personal life and occupation is nonexistent.

There was never a definite line between my personal life and my occupation. When we used to have to fill out these time and effort reports for the university, I had trouble doing it, because anthropology for me is more of a way of life, than a job. It’s not that I did not want the paycheck at the end of the month, so, while I collected things to use in class and bought some things specifically because of their design and their method of manufacture to use in class it was also something that I wanted to enjoy in the house.

The ethnographic textile collections also allowed opportunities through material objects to make foreigners to the U. S. feel integrated and welcomed into the predominantly Caucasian and Christian Midwest. According to Sherry:

Recently some graduate students from India came to my home for a going away party for a visiting scholar. When they came in the front door several said ‘oh I feel like I am back home.’ There is a real connection for them. I enjoy having the students feel comfortable here and it is important for them to know that their culture is appreciated. It is also important for me and for non-Indians to have our interest and appreciation piqued. Anything that we can do to become aware and appreciate other cultures is important.

Part of Raelyn’s former extension job description was to educate through ethnographic textiles.

At one point in time, the Midwest experienced an influx of immigrants from southeastern Asia. Part of my job with extension services was help-
ing to educate native born Americans about this new group of refugees. We put together an exhibit that traveled around the Midwest. It gave me a great excuse to learn things about the people and to learn about their textiles!

Membership. Collecting of ethnographic textile items was viewed as an important aspect of relationship building by many of the informants. The collecting of ethnographic textiles helped cement relationships in families, between friends from different cultures, and helped create lasting global connections. According to Marcy the relationships forged with the vendors are both time-consuming and an important aspect of the collecting experience.

During a research trip, we would treat ourselves by going to the Taj Hotel and a small shop behind the hotel owned by a family from Kashmir. Over many trips to the store, we became friends as we shared tea, looked at photos of their homeland to which it was now dangerous to return, and generally talked. Very special items were brought out for us to see, some of which were way out of our price range. However the three men knew that we appreciated valuable textiles and recognized very high quality work. Part of the fun of my most recent trip was to take my husband to meet my friends as my husband had heard so much about our outings to the Taj and about the men from Kashmir.

According to Margaret, a retired nurse, her interest in quilting allowed her to fortify a relationship between two cultures and across two generations. A friend from Ghana presented Margaret with a quilt square originally sewn by her friends’ deceased mother. Margaret quilted together pieces from her own textile collection and Ghanaian fabric given to her by her friend. The quilt held a “special place” in Margaret’s home and heart as it represented two distinct cultures and included beloved textile pieces from her friend, her friend’s mother, and from her own fabric collection.

According to LouAnn, collecting textiles is a visual representation of the relationships she has shared with African women in the countries she has visited.

The relationships behind the collection are what are truly important. This pin someone gave me in support of a relationship between the U. S. and Africa for AIDS/ HIV awareness. I have been able to return to Nigeria and Tanzania many times. Many of the women there will give me a dress or send a dress over with colleagues as a gift. These gifts mean a lot to me and truly represent our ties.

The idea of supporting women was an often mentioned reason collectors traveled to diverse lands and sought traditional textile pieces. By collecting textiles
made by women, the informants felt they were not only connecting with a larger, global community, but contributing to the support of less empowered members of the world. According to Raelyn,

The societal reasons to collect have been a new idea for me. I have a real feeling of solidarity with the women who have made the items I collect. Most of the textiles are made by women, especially by those who do not have many resources.

This idea of supporting women in the world was also mentioned by Lyssa,

For me, one of the most important concepts of collecting is that many of the pieces were made by women. The sense of women’s creative and personal expression is very meaningful to me. Feeling that connection with other women who are making things and living with them and being able to live with these things myself is a way to bridge very different cultures and ideas.

**Security.** One of the reasons the informants sought to purchase ethnographic textiles was to preserve textile traditions and techniques for students, the academic community, and for family members. In this way, they were “sustaining elements of extrinsic traditionality” for present and future individuals who shared an interest in textiles (Arnould and Price 2000, 151). Through their tangible collections, the lessons, scholarly research, and exhibitions based on their collections, as well as their scrapbooks and memories shared with students, members of the community, and family members, the informants were amassing a substantial archive. This archive of ethnographic textile products could not only be used by the members of the community responsible for the production of the textile products but also by anyone else in the present or future who appreciates such textile products. Hence, the collections seemed to give the collectors a sense of personal importance and achievement as they made contributions to present and future generations. According to Jonathan,

Our family heirlooms give us and our kids a sense of time and place and familiar social connections. I don’t think this is unique. We were sitting with our grandchildren [during a family gathering] and my sister-in-law intentionally used [textile] articles from my grandparents. And I turned to our grandson Joel and he probably did not care but it was 5-generations at the table. It was a way to tell some of our grandmothers’ stories.

Many of the collectors had devoted a great deal of their lives to actively collecting and researching ethnographic textiles. As a result, many of the textiles
within their collections had great symbolic and sentimental meanings. Marcy re-
layed this story regarding an object that was imbued with great symbolic and sen-
timental meaning and that would continue as an important part of her collection to
be secured for future generations.

This Chinese collar was given to me by a friend in Singapore. The
collar was given to my friend by her fiancé as an engagement gift. Soon after the engagement, her fiancé was killed in an automobile acci-
dent. It had been over 5 years since the accident and my friend wanted
someone to have the collar who would appreciate it. I was so honored
and the piece is stunning. It always has a place of prominence in our
home.

Community. By collecting ethnographic textiles, the informants believed they pro-
vided a service to the community because they were collecting textiles created via
traditional modes of textile production that were becoming increasingly rare. In this
way, they were preserving this aspect of the community. According to Patty,

Some of the things I have collected you cannot find anymore. The
markets are depleted or the traditional people do not have those old
things anymore. They have switched to plastics and to things they have
seemed to value and like more and you cannot find traditional things
anymore. So in spite of what I thought, I have ended up with some rare
pieces.

According to Marcy,

I work very hard to buy directly from the artisans who made the tex-
tiles and try to pay a fair price. For me, that is providing an income to
the artisan and helping to sustain a living tradition. By being able to
meet the artisans, we often have fairly lengthy chats about our lives and
I hope that the learning that ensues is valued in both directions.

What is interesting about the collections amassed by the informants is the
fact that the communities’ whose traditions they want to keep alive are not nec-
essarily communities in which they are members. Their research and their trav-
els have introduced them to these diverse communities and cultures. In this way,
the collectors’ own physical de-territorialization has allowed them access to these
communities and their traditions and textile products. According to Jean, a re-
tired anthropology professor, the research she conducted concerning African tex-
tiles is part of a vanishing cultural heritage. Jean, a Caucasian North American,
through her research and travels was able to preserve through scholarly writings the
tradition and culture of a dying North African textile art. One reason why the informants might have felt the need or desire to preserve these other communities’ traditions is due to the fact that these collectors seemed to believe that they were in the position to do so. The borrowing of traditions from separate cultures became nested into a cohesive, idealized, and shared narrative space. The collectors felt a sense of community with diverse cultures and artisans by purchasing and appreciating the sellers’ wares.

Because the collectors took such an active part in the acquisition process of collecting and actively learning more about their textiles, many informants mentioned that it was their responsibility as educators to share other communities’ traditions with their students or the community at large.

Education is very important to me. I have thought about coming to the college, once a week, like every Wednesday, wearing an outfit from a different country, I thought that would be kind-of a fun thing and a good way to educate others about diversity and creating relationships with other people. [LouAnn]

I think it is important for us to learn about others and to know that there are other ways of living. There are many cultures centuries older than ours and we all have something to learn from one another. Also our design aesthetic, the way we perceive and creatively reflect the world is only one way. [Sherry]

Informants seemed to recognize the fact that, through globalization, the boundaries between communities and cultures are becoming much less rigid and the items of their collections are becoming de-territorialized. In order to prepare their students for inevitable interactions with individuals from diverse communities, the informants felt it was their job to introduce their students to aspects of these communities’ cultures.

**Conclusions and Future Research**

In this paper, the collectors of ethnographic textiles used their collections as a way to both express their personal identity and become part of a larger community of textile collectors, collectors of culture, and lovers of art. Collectors used their textile collections to develop relationships, collect stunning pieces, and expand their own and others’ knowledge and acceptance of other cultures. The collectors integrated, synthesized, and interpreted traditional artistic expression, finding significant meaning in creative works. Although consumption acts may be fleeting moments in a life story, they can provide powerful contingent confirmation of a
true self. Through the purchase and use of particular products, ethnographic textile objects created, produced, and made public, personal identities and expressions of self. In this way, Arnould and Price's (2000) conceptualization of consumption as a series of authenticating acts and authoritative performances worked well as a means for analyzing the interview data. The collectors interviewed widened their minds and spirits through their ethnographic textile collections. According to the sentiments of one collector that was echoed by other informants, "textiles are my love, my passion. It's what I have done for years and years and years. I can see my own history and my own growth, intellectually and as a person."

Based on the results of this study, the collectors of ethnographic textiles proved to be knowledgeable resource people concerning the items they collected. Although seven of the twelve informants were employed in the closely related fields of art and design, anthropology, and textiles and clothing in academic settings, all twelve of the informants provided a wide range of collecting experience, interests, and passions. While it would certainly behoove future researchers to interview a wider range of collectors representing many different occupational categories, it is clear that, even among collectors from closely related occupational areas, individual differences exist in terms of the process of collecting and the meanings attached to those collections. Hence, in the planning of museum exhibitions and lecture series, museum professionals would be wise to draw upon this variety of individual collecting experience. Further, the collecting of ethnographic textiles, and presumably the collecting of other cultural forms, was viewed by the collectors as an important way to build relationships, both professional and personal. Museum programming catered and advertised to very specific collectors of culture, such as textiles, folk art, and glass pieces, may help build strong and fruitful relationships for the individuals, museums, and the larger community.

The information shared by the collectors in this study seems to indicate that they do collect ethnographic textiles as a means to avoid the sense of anomie that is endemic in contemporary society. Although no informants stated specifically that the reason they collected ethnographic textiles was to create a place for themselves within contemporary society, the information from their interviews suggested that they were using their collecting behavior to establish themselves as unique individuals who were also a part of a larger community of ethnographic textile producers and consumers. Thus, it can be inferred from the collectors' statements that a sense of anomie, perhaps on a subconscious level, was a driving force behind their collecting behavior. In future research, investigators could verbally probe the collectors during interviews for more detailed information regarding their feeling of anomie and its relationship to their collecting behavior.

Several additional questions remain unanswered by the data collected for this project. Due to the fact that the majority of collectors were women, it remains unknown whether men's collecting behavior can also be classified as a form of authenticating act or authoritative performance. Future researchers interested in
this topic could attempt to interview male collectors to compare their responses to those of female collectors to identify any apparent gender differences. Additionally, all of the collectors in our study were Caucasians who collected textiles representing ethnicities that were different from their own. It would be interesting to explore the meanings applied to the collections of non-Caucasian collectors of textile products whose ethnic origins were congruent with their own ethnic identities. Perhaps differences in the responses of Caucasian and non-Caucasian collectors of ethnographic textiles would reveal that collecting processes and collection meanings vary by ethnicity.

Acknowledgment

Data from this manuscript "The process and meaning of ethnographic textile collecting" was presented by Sara Marcketti at the 2005 University of Lincoln Nebraska symposium, "Collectors, Collecting, and Collections."

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