

The End Game: A Dark Story

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The following are short extracts from the Web on various psychiatric disorders, and commentary of my own on related phenomena.

Some Psychiatric Observations Relevant to Collecting. Attributions given. Some Commentary by Presenter (S. Eisinger)

➤ What is obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)? Medline Plus

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental disorder in which you have thoughts (obsessions) and rituals (compulsions) over and over. They interfere with your life, but you cannot control or stop them.

➤ What are the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)?

People with OCD may have symptoms of obsessions, compulsions, or both:

- **Obsessions** are repeated thoughts, urges, or mental images that cause anxiety. They may involve things such as
 - Fear of germs or contamination
 - Fear of losing or misplacing something
 - Worries about harm coming towards yourself or others

Unwanted forbidden thoughts involving sex or religion

- Aggressive thoughts towards yourself or others
 - Needing things lined up exactly or arranged in a particular, precise way
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- **Compulsions** are behaviors that you feel like you need to do over and over to try to reduce your anxiety or stop the obsessive thoughts. Some common compulsions include
 - Excessive cleaning and/or handwashing
 - Repeatedly checking on things, such as whether the door is locked or the oven is off
 - Compulsive counting
 - Ordering and arranging things in a particular, precise way

Hoarding and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

From **Randy O. Frost**, a professor of psychology at Smith College, is the author of "Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things."

A passion for collecting is a healthy outlet and an activity that keeps people connected to the world around them. But it can become pathological when it crosses the line into hoarding. One misconception about the difference between collecting and hoarding is the idea that collectors save things of value and that hoarders save trash.

Both hoarding and collecting involve assigning special value to possessions. For collectors, new possessions become part of a larger set of items and considerable time and energy go into organizing and displaying them. When a collector expands acquisitions beyond well-defined collections and loses the ability to keep these possessions organized, it becomes a hoarding problem.

For the person whose collecting has become hoarding, possessions become unorganized piles of clutter that are so large that they prevent rooms from being used for normal activities. When collecting becomes hoarding, motivation to display items is lost, and people become fearful of others seeing, touching or even commenting on their belongings. Yet the drive to add more to the collection still leads them to acquire things that only end up in the pile, and once in the pile, objects are seldom looked at again. Many people with hoarding problems have homes filled with recently purchased items that have never been opened or have the price tags still attached.

Hoarding disorder is a persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions because of a perceived need to save them. A person with hoarding disorder experiences distress at the thought of getting rid of the items. Excessive accumulation of items, regardless of actual value, occurs. Feb 3, 2018

Hoarding vs. Collecting? By Keara Valentine

It may seem as if someone with a large collection of specific items is hoarding, but that's not always the case. Collecting is different from hoarding. Collectors keep their items organized, and perhaps even prominently displayed in an organized manner. They often feel pride over these possessions, maybe even widely sharing and showing them off.

Someone who hoards items typically doesn't organize them — they're often accumulated chaotically, sometimes even taking up otherwise livable space. Hoarders may feel ashamed of their accumulation of possessions and try to hide their clutter. Many times, someone who hoards will find themselves in financial debt or living in dangerous conditions. Symptoms of hoarding may indicate an underlying issue, such as OCD.

(S Eisinger) OCD occurs over a large range of behaviors from severe and incapacitating to quirky character traits. Many people have mild or well-controlled OCD. Collecting (stamps, coins, or anything else) is a socially acceptable activity that allows OCD tendencies to be channeled into worthwhile goals. In a sense, for some with OCD tendencies, collecting is therapeutic.



➤ **What Is Dementia? Symptoms, Types, and Diagnosis (NIH National Institute on Aging)**

Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning — thinking, remembering, and reasoning — to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities. Some people with dementia cannot control their emotions, and their personalities may change. Dementia ranges in severity from the mildest stage, when it is just beginning to affect a person's functioning, to the most severe stage, when the person must depend completely on others for basic activities of daily living, such as feeding oneself.

Dementia affects millions of people and is more common as people grow older (about one-third of all people age 85 or older may have some form of dementia) but it is **not** a normal part of aging. Many people live into their 90s and beyond without any signs of dementia.

There are several different forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, which is the most common.

➤ **What are the signs and symptoms of dementia?**

Signs and symptoms of dementia result when once-healthy neurons (nerve cells) in the brain stop working, lose connections with other brain cells, and die. While everyone loses some neurons as they age, people with dementia experience far greater loss.

The signs and symptoms can vary depending on the type and may include:

- Experiencing memory loss, poor judgment, and confusion
- Difficulty speaking, understanding and expressing thoughts, or reading and writing
- Wandering and getting lost in a familiar neighborhood
- Trouble handling money responsibly and paying bills
- Repeating questions
- Using unusual words to refer to familiar objects
- Taking longer to complete normal daily tasks
- Losing interest in normal daily activities or events
- Hallucinating or experiencing delusions or paranoia
- Acting impulsively
- Not caring about other people's feelings
- Losing balance and problems with movement

(S. Eisinger) The good news is that people with active minds and bodies have a lower incidence of dementia, therefore collectors who are immersed in the activity may avoid or lessen the extent of dementia. A circumscribed activity like collecting might serve people with mild dementia well, since they can continue to function in a familiar setting, and continue to derive pleasure from it. Dangers are low, with the exception of predatory actions of others like theft, fraud, and manipulation.

Addiction

In an online article about addictive collecting, Hale Dwoskin, CEO and director of training of *Sedona Training Associates* provided a list of symptoms of a collecting addiction:

- You look for/buy/trade collectibles for hours on end, and the time you spend doing this is increasing
- You think about collectibles constantly, even when you're not collecting
- You have missed important meetings/events because of collecting
- It's difficult for you to not buy more collectibles, even for just a few days
- You try to sneak more collectibles into your home
- You have tried, unsuccessfully, to stop collecting
- Your family or friends have asked you to cut back on collecting
- Your personal interests have changed because of your collecting
- You have lost a personal or professional relationship because of collecting

“Although almost any behavior can become addictive, the pattern of behavior characteristic of collectors makes it especially prone to addiction. Most collectors interviewed mentioned the search for additions to a collection as the central activity of their collecting behavior. Rather than spend time examining or organizing items that are already in the collection, collectors prefer to search or shop for additions to the collection. Search behavior may be compulsively and ritualistically enacted. Acquiring rather than possessing provides the temporary fix for the addict. A sense of longing and desire — a feeling that something is missing in life — is temporarily met by adding to the collection. But this is a temporary fix, a staving off of withdrawal, followed by a feeling of emptiness and anxiety that is addressed by searching for *more*. *Shopping* and searching are the ritualized means by which the collector obtains a sense of competence and *mastery in life*. These activities are the bittersweet consequences of experiencing longing in the arena of the marketplace”.

“Collectors often refer to themselves, only half in jest, as suffering from a mania, a madness, an addiction, a compulsion, or an obsession. Because collecting is generally a socially approved activity, no one is likely to treat such a confession as stigmatizing in the way that it would *be* for an *alcoholic*, a heroin addict, a *compulsive gambler*, or someone truly believed to be mentally ill...But like much *humor* there is an uneasy fear behind these self-admissions, for some collectors really are out of control”.

(S. Eisinger) Another manifestation of collecting addiction is the satisfaction of placing a coin in a “hole” in an album, or a stamp in the right slot on an album page. This activity actually results in a dopamine-endorphin response in the body, which is deeply satisfying to the individual, but short-lasting. This physical and psychological reaction mimics the reactions to other addictive behaviors, some of which are much more dangerous than coin or stamp collecting.

Dealer Fantasy (by S. Eisinger)

This entity describes someone who believes he or she is a dealer in coins or stamps, or is preparing to become a dealer. They study the material intensively, and label it according to grading standards and catalog descriptions. They assign prices. The problem is two-fold.

First of all, they never actually present their material in a coin or stamp show, or offer it on the web, or any other sales environment. (Some with dealer fantasy may have had slight experience—usually not very successful—in trying to sell their material.)

Secondly, their pricing and grading is highly unrealistic, usually way over-priced and over-graded to the point of absurdity. This is a manifestation of “delusions of grandeur” and may be linked to other psychiatric disorders noted here.

The material may be extremely voluminous, occupying many boxes, or even a whole room. The display cards (for stamps) or the coin two-by-twos may be obsessively neat and orderly. There is a clear linkage to obsessive compulsive disorder.

I have seen massive amounts of material prepared in this manner, almost all of it worthless in the real marketplace. But, for better or worse, it occupied hundreds or thousands of hours of effort and study, perhaps time not badly spent for the aging collector.

Fraud Victim (by S. Eisinger)

This trait is shared by many seniors, and is closely linked to dementia. As previously noted, one third of individuals over eighty-five have some degree of dementia, and one of the cardinal signs of dementia is inability to manage money.

Sad, indeed, is the victimization of dementia sufferers by mail-order companies who use deceitful tactics to entice people to order material. This includes glossy advertisements, elaborate packaging such as fancy wooden display boxes, gaudy promises of investment success, and astonishing over-pricing, sometimes ten or twenty-fold or worse. Order forms for more material accompany each package of material, and material is sent “on approval.”

Also participating in fraud or near-fraud are the “late night” TV shows hawking coins. Advertisements in popular magazines and even in our own Democrat and Chronicle newspaper present deceptive and predatory “opportunities” on a regular basis, even today.

We have seen many examples of this. Frequently, sales slips or invoices are available with the collection, carefully preserved in the elegant teak or mahogany box containing worthless coins. These paper documentations of what grandpa paid foster the belief in heirs that they will be handsomely rewarded financially for grandpa’s coins or stamps. Not uncommonly, the collector or his heirs express anger and disbelief when they are presented with the real market value of their material. We have seen examples of near bankruptcy brought on by predatory and dishonest marketing.

Fraud and dishonesty can occur when collections are bought by professional buyers who buy a previously unidentified item of great value for a pittance. This is a great fear of heirs trying to sell a collection. We have seen or heard of such events, but fortunately this seems to be uncommon. Most dealers are honest, if for no other reason than to preserve their reputations.

Recommendations—Strategies to Improve the “End Game.” (S. Eisinger)

- 1. Make a Plan. Put it in writing. Discuss the plan with your family, your attorney, and your financial advisor. Get the Collection appraised. Make sure your heirs have access to it (know where it is located, have the combination to the safe, etc.*
- 2. Divest yourself of your collection before you die or become incompetent.*
- 3. Donate your collection. Confirm acceptance in advance.*
- 4. Use a “Buddy System” with a close friend, who understands the material (stamps or coins). Your “Buddy” will take care of your collection when you die or become incapacitated, and act in the best interests of your heirs.*
- 5. Do NOT will your collection to children or spouse who express no interest or knowledge of the collection.*
- 6. Exercise great caution willing your collection to family members at large, to divide up the collection themselves.*
- 7. Do NOT project unfounded estimates of value to your heirs.*
- 8. Destroy the collection. This may be difficult for you, but remember, it probably brought you a lot of joy, and fulfilled its mission in the world.*