

# Record collections as musical archives: Gender, record collecting, and whose music is heard

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## Abstract

In this article the authors extend the concept of the museum and its collecting practices to record collections, and position record collections as musical archives that are representative of our popular music heritage. They recognize the role of material culture and museums in fostering social memory while also noting the absence of second-wave feminism in museum representation. Research on the archival turn in feminism suggests some intersections between material culture literature and some feminist thought and practices, but such overlap requires further examination. The authors suggest that masculine dominance of record collecting has implications for representing whose music heritage and tastes are being preserved. The literature on collecting has traditionally defined masculine actors as collectors while positioning feminine actors as consumers. This article looks at record collecting in detail and argues that a feminist critique of archiving in record collecting provides valuable insights into gender and power relations. Ethnographic research of record collectors conducted in 2006 and 2010–2013 shows that women do collect, but their collecting practices are overlooked due to the type of objects or genres being collected, and where they do exhibit the same qualities of masculine collectors, they are seen as anomalies and often downplay the value of their collections. Furthermore, gender bias is perpetuated when personal collections become the basis of musical canons and are institutionalized through reissue labels or museum collections. This maintains the masculine hegemony seen in music cultures more generally and has implications for creating and building an inclusive musical heritage.

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## Introduction

The archival turn in feminism, as captured by Eichhorn (2013), presents archival practice and the content of archives as sources of powerful resistance to multiple hegemonies. Eichhorn argues that her text on archives from the 1990s onwards, including case studies of zine and Riot Grrrl collections, ‘takes seriously the possibility of the archive and special collection as central rather than peripheral sites of resistance’ (2013: 23). This article examines to what extent resistance of masculinities within record collecting is observable, and whether a feminist perspective can assist in understanding such resistance to hegemonic music practices. The gendered nature of record collecting and music cultures more broadly is well described. In popular culture, record collecting has been predominantly associated with masculine identities. For example, Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity* and Harvey Pekar’s *American Splendor* present stereotypical masculine protagonists who pursue record collecting above nearly all other activities (Shuker, 2010). The record collector is often portrayed as obsessive, perhaps socially awkward, but generally knowledgeable and usually male. Brewster and Broughton (1999) describe the record collector stereotype as follows: ‘People will find you boring, your skin will start to suffer, but you will find solace in long, impenetrable conversations with fellow junkies about Metroplex catalogue numbers or Prelude white labels.’ They argue that these behaviours explain the masculine dominance of record collecting and extend their claim to DJs. They present such anti-social tropes as a reason for the gender imbalance in DJing: ‘Without wishing to be sexist, we suspect this unhealthy, obsessive, anal retentive behaviour fully explains why there have been so few female DJs’ (1999: 15–16).

Drawing on observations from fieldwork conducted with record collectors and DJs from Australia, the USA and the UK, this article discusses gender asymmetries that underscore and are amplified in collecting music, and the associated accumulation of cultural capital. It discusses the important consequences, beyond collecting, that stem from this gender asymmetry when we consider how such collections influence and shape the canon of ‘great works’. Drawing on Bannister (2006), who critiques the shaping of canons that predominantly reflect the tastes of white, middle-class males, this article brings ethnographic insights to this dynamic. The gender asymmetry in record collecting reflects a dichotomy within the music industry that positions women as marginal to music making, mostly as fans and consumers, while men are situated as central actors and producers (Maalsen and McLean, 2015; Strong, 2014; Whiteley, 2000). Just as Cohen (1997) suggests that rock music works as a site of active production of masculinity, exclusionary practices produce music scenes more broadly as masculine-dominated spaces, from record stores to performing, to consuming and producing music, and in spaces of industry management. Scenes of exclusion have been considered in different material cultural contexts, including colonial–Pawnee relations (Pugh, 2013), where items such as kettles that were introduced by colonizers shifted Pawnee gender representation in political contexts and marginalized women. This article considers

such gendered processes and responds to the masculine dominance of music worlds and canons, the gendered processes of personal and institutionalized collections, and encourages a movement to produce more work on musical heritage through examining how women participate in record collecting in their everyday lives.

Beyond the study of music collections, this article has wider significance to issues of women and objects, or feminist material culture studies. As such, it speaks to the argument raised by Bartlett and Henderson (2016: 157) that the field of material culture studies 'avoids feminist questions' and displays a 'tendency to manage its subjects and objects of enquiry in relatively apolitical terms'. While there is debate around what constitutes a feminist object, it is generally accepted that feminist objects contain political agency and can 'unsettle' memories, challenging and disrupting historical narratives (Henderson and Bartlett, 2016; MacDonald, 2009). As MacDonald notes, new memories 'may expose previous silences, raising questions about their motives or the power dynamics of which they were part' (2009: 93). We therefore position this article as a contribution to broader debates about gender and material culture, bringing feminist questions into dialogue with collection practices, revealing previous silences and challenging dominant music culture narratives.

In this article, we address the following two claims: first, that the masculine dominance of record collecting has implications for representing whose music heritage and tastes are being preserved; and second, that this dominance marginalizes gender diversity in representing the tastes and opinions on which music is considered valuable and collectable, and therefore suggests that the musical heritage being consumed and catalogued in large collections is gendered. If, as Miller (2005) observes, 'the things that people make, make people', then in the context of theories on record collecting, we need to consider how the music that people make can contribute to a collective cultural history. Specialized collections of music produce personal realities of a musical past and specific versions of musical cultural heritage. The tensions between making generalizations around record-collecting cultures and understanding the specificities of particular individuals' inclinations are addressed in this article. To engage with these claims, we first consider the literature on record collecting and then draw upon ethnographic insights to tease out dynamics in the gendered practices of record collecting. We conclude that women's record collecting can be used to (1) challenge dominant musical narratives; (2) renegotiate what music matters; (3) resist categorization of women record collectors as 'consumers'; and (4) reconfigure music collections as sites inclusive of gender differences. These conclusions speak to broader debates on feminist material culture and broaden the parameters of debate within that field.

## **Record collecting as a masculine-dominated practice**

Along with Goggin and Tobin (2009a, 2009b), we argue that women are highly skilled record collectors and contribute to creative archive formation, despite discourses that marginalize their contributions. The prevalence of such discourses is captured in the confessional narrative offered by Lisa Wheeler, a record collector profiled in *Goldmine* magazine, in the following quote:

My name is Lisa, and I'm a record collector. Yes, I attend record shows, dive through dusty garage sale boxes and comb online auction sites in the quest of additional stash. I have a room with full stereo system (yes, with a turntable), two victrolas and floor-to-ceiling shelves dedicated to a collection of thousands of pieces of vinyl and a couple of thousand compact discs (not to mention a closet that is home to 20 long boxes of 45 rpm singles). Even with all of that time (and money) spent on my hobby, I am still considered somewhat of a freak in what is the mainly masculine pursuit of record collecting, (Wheeler, 2006)

In her self-reflection, Lisa articulates multiple practices and materialities that form record collecting. In terms of materiality, she mentions a sizable collection; in terms of scale, diversity and breadth, and in terms of practices that indicate dedication to collection, Lisa mentions her time and money invested in this activity. Despite women like Lisa, there is still the 'intuitive acceptance of the idea that record collecting, within Anglo-American cultures at least, is among the more predictably male-dominated of music practices' (Straw, 1997: 4). While women collectors exist, the image of the masculine collector is perpetuated through media, popular culture, literature on record collecting, and is reflected in the masculine dominance of the activity. Women such as Lisa, who simultaneously embody the definition of collector as broadly understood but are not commonly understood as fitting the mould of 'record collector', note that their collecting renders them a 'freak'. In this section, we will specifically look at the interplay of gender and record collecting before discussing how the relations of gendered practices of musical consumption then play out in the context of cultural memory and music as cultural heritage.

Objects and our interactions with them reflect and have real effects on our social worlds and demonstrate that objects can structure and stratify (Miller, 1987, 1995, 1998, 2005; Tilley, 1990, 1994; Woodward, I, 2007). For example, Sophie Woodward (2007) shows how a woman's identity is chosen through the clothes she wears, in what she terms the 'wardrobe moment' rendering clothes as mediators of public image and the private. Similar observations have been made of the role a range of objects play in establishing and communicating identity, from the safety-pin's appropriation and link to the political in punk (Hebdige, 1979), to the role of music and its materialities in constructing a sense of self and the social worlds in which these identities inhabit (Bennett, 2000) – apt examples considering the link between music, materiality, canonization and gender that we discuss. The impact of materials on social dimensions is particularly pertinent in the context of collecting, which has traditionally been viewed as an inherently masculine activity:

The collector is by definition a man of possessive instincts; but the possessive instinct in his case is inseparable from a love of risk, or battle: he has to conquer the object he wants to own; hostility, rivalry and sharp practice only whet his appetite and rouse his fighting instincts. (Cabonner, 1963: viii)

As this quote illustrates, the attributes associated with collecting include competitiveness, risk-taking, battle, conquering, rivalry, hostility, fighting instincts and skill – attributes that are traditionally considered masculine. There are parallels with this description and the early colonial practices of collecting, where collecting was predominantly a male activity, focused on objects of value to men, and which 'took place in a relatively

hierarchical and androcentric context of moral difference' (Lipset, 2016: 333). Cabonner (1963) defines collector behaviours and practices in strictly competitive terms that are analogous to a battlefield which further illustrates the idea of collecting as imperial conquest. But there is another element ascribed to collecting that distinguishes it from accumulation or hoarding – that of connoisseurship. Connoisseurship developed as central to the imperialist repository, with collecting as illustrative of connoisseurship, and by extension, of control (Breckenridge, 1989: p.199). Within connoisseurship, the quality of the collection is important, and as Dougan (2006) notes, reflects the collector's expert status – 'The main criterion of an expert collector is that he (and they are overwhelmingly male) places greater value on quality than quantity – thereby turning compulsive hoarding into meaningful desire' (p. 45). Dougan's comment reveals to some extent the criteria that have traditionally shaped the gender relations embedded within collecting. But are such criteria valid, and do they overlook other meaningful collecting practices and interactions with material objects? And how does this influence our understanding of collecting as a gendered practice? These are questions that we answer in the empirical ethnographic discussion section of the article.

Much of the traditional literature on collecting views women as consumers who accumulate things rather than collectors. The masculine/feminine collecting schism is related to the conceptual dualities that have had a strong and enduring presence but which have, of course, also received widespread critique (Barry, 1999). Consumption, as Miller (1998) explains in the context of high street shopping is a practice of sacrifice and love which constructs the other as the desiring subject. The labour of care and provisioning is gendered and reinforces gender asymmetries as the woman is positioned as the 'person whose desires are subsumed in the labour of provisioning and the man as the person whose personal desires can and should be expressed and indulged in shopping' (Miller, 1998: 44). It is no surprise therefore that collecting rather than consumption as a masculine activity is seen as actively self-definitional and linked to status. A woman is rarely afforded the status of a collector unless she adopts a more 'masculine' approach:

Grand scale collecting almost always calls for aggressive and material ambition to a degree uncharacteristic of women, aside from women's historic economic position. Those who came within hailing distance of collecting giants were women who seemed to exhibit the masculine strain of a highly developed competitiveness, although this in no way detracts from the position of women as amateurs. (Rigby and Rigby, 1944: 326–327)

Rigby and Rigby highlight the social and financial constraints on women's collecting activity. Collecting requires considerable investment of money, time and self, and therefore requires inhabiting social roles that enable wealth in these areas. From the empirical research informing this article, these issues of economic constraints and investment of time required to collect records are ongoing and further shape the degree to which collectors considered their practices as competent.

Collecting is explicitly gendered and most often along masculine terms. Elsner and Cardinal (1994), for example, view collecting as a set of scientific and ordered practices, placing it firmly within the 'masculine' realm, claiming that 'classification precedes collection' and that 'collecting is classification lived and experienced in three dimensions'

(1994: 1-2). The rationality of classification distinguishes a collector from a 'miser/accumulator/hoarder' (Pearce, 1995: 21). The definition of a 'collection' aligns with masculinist collecting practices, with references to size, quality, and content (p. 208). Pearce is writing in the context of European collecting but her observations can speak to the politics of collecting broadly. Understanding collecting in only these terms may preclude other equally valid collections and approaches to collecting, and the multiplicities that enable such expressions of archive creation.

The question of what is considered a valid collection is connected to the types of objects that are being collected, and gendered dimensions exist regarding objects that are considered as collectible. For example, the collecting of objects such as jewellery and dolls was once regarded as less valuable than items such as stamps, military paraphernalia, coins and mechanical objects, such items that are more commonly associated with masculinist pursuits. Martin (1999) cites a study by Gelber (1992) on the origins of stamp collecting, which was once considered a feminine pursuit. He claims that philately became a masculine-dominated activity when the 'commodity value of old and rare stamps was recognized and they were vested with the values and rituals of the male domain of the stockmarket' (Martin, 1999: 68). Commodification of stamps simultaneously renders the activity masculine, shifting it from feminine dominance and, drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural distinction, this rearticulation of value can be seen as a taste marker.

It was not the objects themselves or even the collecting practices of different genders that saw women's collecting as less valuable; the gender roles themselves shaped ways of being. While masculine individuals collected, feminine agency was limited to consumption:

By 1880 in France, women were perceived as mere buyers of bibelots which they bought as they did clothing, in their daily bargain hunting. Men, of course, collected too, but their collecting was perceived as serious and creative. Women were the consumers of objects; men were collectors. Women bought to decorate and for the sheer joy of buying, but men had a vision for their collections and viewed their collections as an ensemble with a philosophy behind it. (Saisselin cited in Belk and Wallendorf, 1997: 9)

The vision behind the collection, alluded to in the above quote, provided purpose to the collection and collecting practices. A vision also indicates a considerable time investment required to accumulate the knowledge and skill demanded by the particular collecting interest – in other words, an investment of personal labour to acquire cultural capital. This investment of self is significant because it helps define the self. Notably, Belk and Wallendorf (1997) argue that French women also collect; however, the lower status afforded to the focus of their activities reflects widespread subordination of women and helps to reinforce the stratification between genders. Belk and Wallendorf further argue that collecting amounts to a metaphor for capital accumulation and that 'fear of woman as collector rather than consumer may well be because she symbolises a threat to male control and power in society' (1997: 9–10). The affect generated by transforming perceptions of feminine consumerism to collecting is tantamount to threatening neoliberal economies.

In the context of this article, gender relations in collecting have implications for the curating of popular music heritage and particularly whose tastes are being canonized. We will illustrate this with vignettes from research conducted with record collectors in 2006 and more recently with niche reissue record labels in 2010–2013. Record collecting is a masculine-dominated activity, and the interviewees that identified as women often downplayed their collections in comparison to their male counterparts. What defines a collection is important to interrogate in correlation with the restricted musical diversity in reissue labels formed from personal collections. Reissue labels can offer an alternative to mainstream music heritage, but if these non-mainstream spaces also reinforce gender asymmetries, then there are gender implications in this context as well, similar to the gender relations of Indie music in online spaces (Maalsen and McLean, 2015).

To demonstrate the exclusionary nature of collecting, we draw upon fieldwork that was conducted primarily in the Brisbane and Sydney record collecting and DJ scenes. In 2006, many DJs were transitioning from playing vinyl to using digital music software such as Serato when performing. Discussions regarding whether software programs heralded the end of vinyl or whether those using software were ‘authentic’ DJs abounded, making this a fascinating time to conduct research in DJ cultures. The fieldwork for this article involved participant observation, interviews and discussions, either in person or via email, with a gender diverse group of DJs and record collectors. While the emphasis was on collectors and DJs who identified as women, masculine collectors and DJs were included for comparison.

As Shuker (2010) notes, gender is one of the most highly discussed social variable when it comes to record collecting, and evidence supports the ‘popular image of the male record collector’ – an image that he claims is reinforced in popular culture through comics and films such as *High Fidelity* and *Ghost World* (2010: 34). Shuker refers to the dominant male presence on record-collecting websites and forums, and notes that mostly men (95%) form the readership of *Record Collector*, a respected magazine on rare and collectable records, with men also appearing significantly more frequently in its feature ‘The Collector’ (Shuker, 2010: 34).

The tendency for online spaces and specialist literature to attract a largely masculine-identified following became apparent in our own research. Record forums such as SoulStrut.com had more masculine identities and behaviours, both in terms of membership and in actively participating in discussions. Women are not explicitly excluded on such sites and forums but were not highly visible.

Shuker (2010: 35) quotes Laura Vroomen’s observation that ‘the definition of collecting that’s usually employed relies on a particular type of collecting that is probably more common among men’. This reflects Pearce’s observations on masculinist collecting as a distinct, important, and at times self-important occupation; it frequently happens in a specific place and involves set times and practices; it includes paraphernalia that surrounds the collection and which may be as impressive as the collection itself; and, it is physically obtrusive (Pearce, 1995: 214). It is structured, important and legitimate. Martin (1999) reinforces this view, claiming that men’s collecting is ‘consciously competitive, functional and driven by a need for control ... whilst women’s collecting is more often consciously self-referential’ (1999: 70).

The purported seriousness of masculinist collecting, compared to what and how women collect actively, prohibits gender diversity within record collecting, thus characterizing collecting as shaped by a level of fervour that only 'the male collector' can hold. Shuker (2010) demonstrates this when referring to comments made by collectors he interviewed, who mentioned that there are 'very few *genuine* female collectors' (2010: 35, emphasis in original), which suggests that the definition of being a 'collector' relates to the traits of serious collecting we have described. This definition of collecting as masculine and its subsequent focus on male collectors is therefore an exclusionary term and an exclusionary activity that excludes women from collecting discourse and marginalizes women and their musical tastes.

### Exploring gender relations and record collecting in practice

In 2006 and again in 2010–2013, Sophia Maalsen conducted ethnographic work and interviews with record collectors and DJs in Australia and overseas. In 2006 she focused on the local Brisbane and Sydney scene while in 2010–2013 she revisited these sites and additionally broadened her focus to other Australian and international cities. Participants were recruited through advertisements in local music forums and through contacts in her music networks. If a face-to-face interview was not possible, interviews were conducted via Skype or email. A total of 13 participants (inclusive of both research periods) involved in the record-collecting scene were interviewed, and of these, four became important informants, enabling Sophia Maalsen go into the field, attending record meet-ups such as Brisbane's 'Weird Gear', accompanying record shopping forays, attending DJ sets, producing samples from records, and establishing her own record collection. Online ethnography of record sites such as soulstrut.com was also conducted throughout 2006 and 2010–2013. The sample size is justified as the in-depth qualitative research provides considerable insight into the scene. Reflecting the gendered nature of record collecting, only four of these participants were female, and women were markedly absent from the online forums. The experiences of female participants were also considered from other research participants' perspectives, additional observations from the field and the literature.

The way theorists portray the lack of gender diversity in record collecting does not mean that women don't collect; rather, the gendered construction of collecting renders women collectors less visible. For example, Shuker (2010: 36) refers to Bogle's (1999) study on women record collectors and the ease with which she was able to contact women collectors. Both Bogle and Shuker found that women collectors often avoided classifying themselves as such and did not 'talk up' their collecting or collections. A similar humbleness was reflected by participants in Sophia Maalsen's (2006) research:

Sometimes when I'm surrounded by record geeks (as opposed to diggers and DJs) then I have to just laugh. They're all like 'Yeh but do you have the 1998 copy that was pressed backwards with wrong artwork and it had gold writing on it' etc. etc. ... it truly is hysterical ... I don't consider myself a serious digger/record collector, purely b/c I don't care if I buy a re-press/re-issue ... what matters to me is that I can play the track/album out or on radio, hence continuing to educate the community and that is my main mission. (Respondent 1, email message to Sophia Maalsen, June 2006)



Many of the female record collectors interviewed identified masculine traits when discussing their involvement in the practice in relation to other non-collecting females, reflecting the perception of collecting as associated with masculine attributes. However, when comparing themselves to male collectors, the same respondents downplayed any aspect of comparable connoisseurship, and re-emphasized their femininity. For example, from Respondent 1:

Most girls these days would rather be rappers either b/c [sic] there's more spotlight as a rapper or because you don't have to pay for anything other than 'a pen and some paper'. DJing definitely can be expensive, but I guess it's all personal choice. I am definitely not your average kind of female in that I rarely buy new clothes, I don't buy make-up, but I will go out and buy some fresh sneaks, Star Wars toys or some records instead! (Respondent 1, June 2006)

The female respondents made note of their 'girliness', as another contributor put it, when it came to collecting, or deferred to masculine collectors by stating that they were not as 'hardcore' diggers as most of their peers who identified as men. One respondent, although possessing a collection of 4,500 records, mentioned that her crates were hardly comparable to those of one of the male contributors. Such deference was made despite the fact that all the female correspondents adhered to the standards of crate digging and were hardly amateurs in their approach. The relationship to collection – its physical presence, content and the hours spent building it help the participants to mediate their identity as collectors and DJs through records. But they also relate to the material in a nuanced way which reflects their perceived position in a male-dominated scene and practice. Objects are utilized in constructing social identities and for the female participants, by acknowledging that they partake in a masculine-dominated activity, they partially emphasize their femininity by making reference to the style in which they dig and by underrating the quality of their collection. Thus they negate the 'threatening' stance their activity poses to masculinity and the partly contested relationship it places them in with relation to ideal social concepts of femininity.

If women are rarely regarded as collectors, it may be useful to ask if differences exist in their collecting practices that may preclude women from being regarded as such. Asking one male collector about his digging style, he replied:

I look for certain labels, musicians, and usually if I don't know it, I just go for the cover art or year or vibe of the overall packaging. After a while being a digger you start to see the same records and it becomes just normal to flick past those records, so it's always interesting when you find a stack of European records or some privately pressed stuff ... It's all self-education, the more you spend out in the field, the more you learn and the more accustomed and robotic the diggin' process becomes. (Respondent 2, July 2006)

Respondent 2 compares digging to going 'out in the field', which is a particularly masculinist mode of being, tied to historically masculinist scientific exploratory behaviours (Rose, 1993). Respondent 2 deploys masculinist language as a way to describe his strategic engagement and the excitement of a find. Responding to a similar question about digging style, Respondent 1, a female collector replied, 'My main aim when digging hard is to find a wicked break/sample [sic] that someone else doesn't even know about' (Respondent 1, June 2006).

Both these responses allude to the same aim – finding something that very few other people have or know exists – enacting a process of self-education through collecting and refining their tastes. Few differences exist in the actual processes and practices of collecting records based on gender, considering these responses and based on other research participant observations. All respondents mentioned spending countless hours in record stores, often accompanied by a portable turntable player, sifting through records, looking for a particular name or record cover, particularly if they are after a certain break or sample. It is common practice to inform purchase decisions by researching artists and music prior to tackling the crates. In addition, records could be sourced online, in stores, interstate and overseas. For some, however, being a female complicated the in-store purchase process for fear of being judged, especially when starting out in the scene. Researching records online prior to buying in-store was one way of negotiating the fear of entering a male domain:

When I started buying records I was too terrified to listen to them in the store in front of all the dj boys 'cos I wasn't 100% sure how to work the equipment (at that point I hadn't gotten my decks yet) so I'd do my research online, suss out what I'd like, and buy stuff off the shelves without even listening. (Respondent 3, May 2006)

Many noted the considerable time and money invested in the process of record collecting. One respondent for example has 'spent 10s [sic] of thousands of dollars on records and music over the past 18 years' (Respondent 2, July 2006), another notes spending \$100–\$200 per month (Respondent 4, May 2006). The investment of money, time and self parallels the collector's status within the record-collecting community:

The amount of time and effort that I've put into getting these records! The dust, sore back, sore feet, hours of browsing, endless car trips, walks, gross food at record fairs ... I mean, of course in the digging community, your peers are going to see what kind of work you put in and what kind of records you got just by looking at your overall collection. (Respondent 2, July 2006)

The collecting process entails considerable investment of the self, both in terms of building the collection and in defining the collector through it. Creating a sense of self through collecting increases the personal value of the collection beyond the purely economic and plays out into concerns over the collection's future once the collector is no longer able to care for it: 'I mean, for me it's all about the music. I hope when I die, all this music goes somewhere good and to some use and doesn't just end up being sold to a record store' (Respondent 2, July 2006). Not going to 'somewhere good' and of being 'some use' can be seen to reflect negatively not only on the collection but, by extension, the collector's identity and the devaluing of their status within the record-collecting community. Thus, record collecting curates both music and the self. However, despite the similarity in collecting practices between genders, the self that is predominantly produced through the collecting process is white, middle-class males. The canon reflects this and aligns with masculinist musical tastes and masculine performers more broadly (Bannister, 2006; Maalsen and McLean, 2015).

## Marginalizing tastes and collective cultural music history

Record collecting is clearly conceptualized as a masculinist activity, shaped by gendered practices in both collecting and music scenes, and creates a musical hegemony. Access to a disposable income is a key factor, as discussed earlier, as are relationships with technology and the predominance of masculinity within music scenes in general (Shuker, 2010: 37). It is well documented that musical subcultures are mostly masculine spaces, a phenomenon that plays out in the music industry as well (Farrugia, 2010; Reynolds 1999; Thornton 1996; Whiteley 2000). To illustrate one way that these gender relations within record collecting emerge, let us consider the idea of 'seriousness'. In Shuker's (2010) discussions with collectors, the notion of 'seriousness' surfaces, as it also does in the empirical research informing this article. 'Serious' music is associated with 'serious' collecting, which is folded into the identity of male collectors. To be a genuine record collector, seriousness and masculinity are intimately intertwined, often to the exclusion of feminine tropes. Fullington's (2003) research on independent record stores demonstrates a pervasive devaluation of women's music tastes and knowledge. Women and men are judged differently as music consumers. According to the record store staff in Fullington's study:

Where the boyfriend may buy collectible vinyl, she may pick up a CD. The LP is valued more than the CD for various reasons; firstly that LPs are more rare than their CD counterparts. The man is on the hunt; the woman is just along for the ride, so maybe she will buy herself something more on impulse. (2003: 302)

Here, the materiality of the music – vinyl as opposed to CD – and purchasing practices – informed as opposed to spontaneous – play into the gendering of music consumption and collecting. Women consume, vacuously, and men collect, as a hunter might obtain trophy species. Again, masculinist ways of being – out in the field, catching a rare find – saturate record-collecting conceptualizations. The girlfriend's selection of a CD is interpreted as an uninformed purchase, whereas the boyfriend has shown intent and foresight in his purchase of 'valuable' vinyl. He is hunting; she is merely accompanying him. No doubt the cultural capital conferred by the genres they purchase also reflects as significantly on their status as the medium they choose. 'Serious', as a quality connected with predominantly male collecting activity and male musical tastes, has significant implications for cultural memory and heritage through the marginalization of other collecting styles and tastes. The perceived 'seriousness' of collecting practices suggests that it is only male collections that are of value, and only male tastes that help make musical canons and musical memory.

More often than not, this gendered 'seriousness' marginalizes women's tastes and opinions on which music is valuable and collectable. Consequently, the musical heritage being consumed and catalogued in big collections results in an 'officially' sanctioned gendered musical heritage and reinforces the qualities associated with these forms of collecting – mastery, order, and value. Of this we can ask, whose music is valuable, and whose idea of musical heritage is being canonized to produce the cultural history of music in the process?

The musical canon is culturally constructed and influences what is considered collectable. The notion of canon, as Shuker (2010: 89) observes, is central to music leisure practices, including collecting. While the male dominance of record collecting has already been posed as problematic in terms of cultural memory, the concept of the canon makes this doubly problematic with regards to gender. In some ways, the canon itself is gendered and racialized:

The gendered nature of the musical canon is strongly evident, with the marginalization of women in popular music histories; the privileging of male performers and male-dominated or oriented musical styles/genres in discussions of authorship; and the consequent domination of popular music canons by male performers. The canon is also dominated by Anglo-American performers and recordings, who underpin mainstream accounts of the history of popular music. (Shuker, 2010: 90)

By collecting and building collections, collectors acknowledge the existence of canons and in the process help to construct them. Dougan's (2006) analysis of the blues record collectors, in which he describes collectors as 'musical archaeologists, culture brokers, creators, keepers, and through their entrepreneurial efforts, disseminators of a blues canon' (2006: 42), reflects the influence they have over forming canons and cultures of taste. By reinforcing the marginalization of women in music through the creation of gendered canons and by perpetuating these canons through collecting, the role of record collecting in preserving musical heritage is one that has excluded women in constructing the canon, being part of music history, and in collecting and preserving that history. The music history that is performed, canonized, and collected comes from an often-unacknowledged masculinist positioning.

The privileging of masculinist tastes and behaviours within record collecting has important consequences when considering collecting practices as a form of preserving heritage. If the authenticity of record collections mostly hinges upon masculinist tropes, then gender diverse knowledges of record collecting are unlikely to receive canonization. More gender-sensitive analysis is required, especially if, as Bounia (2012: 62) notes, approaches based on material culture studies have been useful for studying collectors and collections, particularly the social lives of things and how meanings have been shaped by object-human interaction, but she contends that the gendered nature of collections has received less attention. With the male bias of record collecting and collecting practices more broadly having been established, we contend that it is important to turn our attention to the implications for the gendered nature of collections.

Shuker claims that there is an 'historical tradition of collectors playing a significant role as cultural preservers' (2010: 49) that is particularly demonstrated in the collector's donation of entire collections to larger institutions to be used for education purposes. The idea of the collector as cultural preservationist is also suggested by Moist (2008: 100) who notes that records can function as cultural documents and not just as objects. The literature on record collecting is dominated by observations on male collectors and the importance of their activities. The connections between the way uniqueness is valued in record collecting and within the Indie music scene are evident in Moist's (2008) and Milano's (2003) discussion of Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore's record collecting.

The record collecting that Moore pursues is beyond ‘obvious mainstream material’ (Moist, 2008: 105) to encompass discovering ‘bastions of unknown information ... gathering information that falls below the radar, so it becomes less ignored’ (Moist, 2008, citing Milano, 2003: 117). Moist’s observation of Moore’s behaviours does two things. Firstly, it reinforces the image of the serious collector as masculine and as collecting serious music. Secondly, it denigrates mainstream popular music, so often associated with femininity, while elevating the masculine hunt for the elusive and the desirability of Indie modes (Maalsen and McLean, 2015). Moist frames Moore’s collecting as a subversive practice that critiques cultural history, drawing upon Moore’s comment, ‘I’m more interested in defending the cultural value of music that’s not allowed into the mainstream. That’s more of a renegade practice’ (Moist, 2008, citing Milano, 2003: 14).

There is no doubt that collecting non-mainstream records is a valuable exercise in cultural preservation. The way it is persistently framed to privilege masculinity in practice and content, however, is problematic, not only because women do collect, but because it diminishes their collecting practices and denigrates those with interest in popular genres. Furthermore, it may continue to write women out of music history, as popular music is often feminized and therefore not considered worthy of addition to musical canons.

## **Record collections, curation and institutionalization**

We have so far demonstrated that the masculine nature of record collecting has implications for music heritage and its canonization, and that certain music tastes are marginalized in the process. We will now analyse how these record-collecting practices can be read in light of curation and institutionalization. Just as colonial collecting practices tied to bureaucracy, categorization and organization demanded curation and institutionalization through museums, libraries and archives (Breckenridge, 1989: 95–96), personal collections contain similar qualities of organization, control and curatorship, and for some, eventual institutionalization. Similarly, the critiques of gender, racial and colonial bias of collections levelled at institutions (Lipset, 2016; Simpson, 1996), can be asked of record collections and specialist labels. We suggest that the music that people make contributes to a collective cultural history, albeit one that privileges certain modes and practices more than others, and that record collections do important work in producing people’s own version of music history. Such personalized curation of music offers diversity to the music histories produced, but we must be attuned to what these histories include and exclude, and the agency of materials to contribute to such exclusions (Pugh, 2013).

There is a body of research that specifically regards record collecting as a curatorial practice and the collections themselves as records of cultural heritage. We reflect on the contribution of Dougan’s (2006) observations about this body of work, specifically on collectors of blues records, which he describes as cultural mediators who perform a second-order curation by selecting, ‘organising, re-conceiving and labeling “the blues,” creating a narrower ontological framework that combines personal taste with critical historiography, culminating in blues reissues’ (2006: 42). This places record collecting more implicitly within the context of museums, and we illuminate the connection between private and institutional connections in this section. One of the collections

discussed here is Smithsonian Folkways, which is described as a museum of sound by its current Associate Director, and which has been institutionalized through its acquisition and incorporation into the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, part of the Smithsonian Institution, as the Smithsonian Folkways label. Men predominantly own these large collections, and the gendered nature of collections, as noted by Bounia (2012), holds implications for cultural memory as a lack of gender diversity, underpinning which musical knowledges and practices are celebrated and reified.

Niche reissue labels as part of the material culture of music offer an alternative history of music to that provided by major labels, music documentaries, and publications such as *Rolling Stone*. Drawing on excerpts from interviews that Sophia Maalsen conducted with selected reissue labels, we argue that reissue labels play a similar role to museums in that they preserve and curate our musical heritage. Labels forming from personal collections have precedent in personal collections-turned-labels which have become institutionalized collections – Smithsonian Folkways is one such example. In 2010–2012, Sophia Maalsen conducted research on reissue labels, both nationally and internationally based, and we include material from semi-structured interviews conducted with these labels. Reissue labels are essentially curatorial. Previously recorded music and albums are selected as significant examples of the artists, genres, or periods the label specializes in, and are then re-released with appropriate artwork and packaging that guides the consumer's listening experience. The selected labels included New York-based punk and powerpop label Sing Sing records, Australian labels The Roundtable and Votary Records, which specialize in rare Australian and jazz recordings, and Smithsonian Folkways, the record label of the Smithsonian Institution. Interviews were conducted via phone or in person. All of the collectors and label owners Sophia Maalsen interviewed were incredibly knowledgeable and passionate about music, and the need to share this music was a driving force for the labels:

I'm a collector and I would appreciate, I always thought I would appreciate it if, someone would re-release these things in a way that kind of really approximated the original thing. Like the same artwork, the same labels. And the more I started digging into that the more I started finding these records that no-one really knew about that I felt really deserved to be given a second life ... You know you kind of hear it and you know this is something that people would like and I really like (Respondent 6, in discussion with Sophia Maalsen, 29 February 2012).

Another respondent reinforced the influence of their personal taste on the music they re-released:

Definitely from our collections. I'd prefer our label to come from our collecting. I could only put things forward that I personally am into. Anything else, and I'm not that interested. Cause I ain't doing it for the dosh! (Respondent 5, 22 August 2011).

The reissue labels discussed here have formed out of personal collections in turn influenced by their music tastes. All these collectors also identified as men. Genres ranged from jazz and psych to punk and powerpop, were drawn from a multitude of cultures and also included miscellaneous recordings of sounds or noise. The cultural multiplicity approach to producing reissues was taken to extreme lengths by Smithsonian

Folkways, the record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. The Museum was founded on the bequest of James Smithson in 1846 ‘for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men’ (Hein, 2010: 53), and the label was acquired by the Museum in 1987, as part of its efforts to increase and disseminate knowledge. The label itself, originally just ‘Folkways’ until its acquisition by the Smithsonian, owes much of its existence to the original founder, Moses Asch, whose own relationship with the label is etched in its mythology.

It is rumoured that a young Asch met Albert Einstein in the 1930s and that after expressing his interest in radios and sound recordings, Einstein supposedly challenged him to ‘make an encyclopaedia of sounds all the human ears might hear and this would be a worthwhile way to spend your life’ (Respondent 5, in discussion with Sophia Maalsen, 15 May 2012). As the current Associate Director of Smithsonian Folkways ponders:

Maybe that happened ... maybe though it’s a metaphor for what he did. In any case it’s descriptive of what he actually did because the scope of the catalogue as you say is overwhelming. It just goes on and on and on and what is going on here. And all I can say is it truly is encyclopaedic. (Respondent 7, 15 May 2012)

The rumoured interaction between Einstein and Asch, and its encyclopaedic collection outcome, certainly displays all the qualities of a serious collector, whose identity is not only formed through the collection, but the collection stands as a monument to him, ensuring his continued influence even after his death.

These collectors and labels play an incredibly important role in preserving our musical heritage, which is most illustrated by Folkways’ mission. Dougan (2006: 47) reflects a similar sentiment when he considers the collector’s role in canon formation. For collectors to make an impact, their collections must be made public. Making private collections public is central to canon formation with collectors becoming ‘archival producers and us[ing] their expertise in selecting the material to be reissued. “The choices we make tend to be the choices one should make”’ (Dougan interview with Spottswood, 2006: 47). The contribution of legendary blues record collectors, all of whom are male, is central to establishing reissue labels, and the formation and preservation of the blues canon (Dougan, 2006).

Bringing together the empirical information on what constitutes record collecting and how archives are made, we argue that there is room for collections to be more encompassing, of genres and musical tastes, considering the masculine preferences embedded in both record collecting and reissue label management practices. As Dougan notes, ‘The songs that were heard were the ones the collectors owned or were willing to share for the purpose of a reissue’ and that the homosocial character of the record-collecting world is maintained by excluding feminine tropes (pp. 54, 57). Effectively, record collecting in itself becomes a gate-keeping act (Farrugia, 2010: 239). In the majority of cases, the music that is heard and reissued is the music that men find worthy and stands in contrast to the feminist turn in archival practices (Eichorn, 2013). Collecting and reissuing, then, are formed and perpetuated as among the practices that reinforce the lack of gender diversity within music cultures:

Interviews with contemporary rock musicians frequently describe how, having learned to play guitars and play them loud, women find that the lines of exclusion are now elsewhere. They emerge when the music is over, and the boys in the band go back to discussing their record collections. (Straw, 1997: 15)

## **Conclusion: Collecting and canonizing?**

This article has drawn upon fieldwork, predominantly in an Australian context, to illustrate gender relations in collecting, curating, and canonizing musical heritage, and to argue for a more encompassing practice of collecting and reissue. Thus, in this article, we have shown how women's record collections (1) challenge dominant musical narratives; (2) renegotiate what music matters; (3) resist categorization of women record collectors as 'consumer'; and (4) reconfigure music collections as sites inclusive of gender differences.

Firstly, addressing the above claims, of dominant musical narratives (1) and renegotiating what music is important (2), we have argued that the masculine nature of record collecting has implications for preserving musical heritage and taste – the musical canon. Secondly, that this masculine dominance in record collecting marginalizes other musical tastes. Such marginalization means risking the loss of other cultural forms and tastes. Music can contribute to a collective cultural history that privileges particular modes, subject matter and processes. The practice of collecting records and building a collection can also produce an individual's own version of a musical heritage, which can reproduce, resist, or renegotiate the biases in the commercial production of music histories. Niche reissue labels collect and repackage music in ways that communicate the importance of musical diversity. But the absence of gender diversity in the collecting realm and also in label management (see Whiteley, 2000) critiques the purported multiplicity. We argue that ignoring gender diversity is one important way in which the heritage of musical tastes is asymmetrically produced.

Next, addressing the categorization of women record collectors as consumers (3) and the potential to reconfigure music collections as inclusive (4), we queried claims that women are consumers and men are producers and collectors of music by examining the language and practices employed by individuals involved in record collecting and reissuing. The masculinist practices that are aligned with serious, authentic record collecting and archive creation have been problematized, and the extent to which they dominate record collecting is somewhat surprising given Eichhorn's (2013) work on feminist archival production practices. Between the commercial and reissue labels, much of the musical heritage of importance to all genders is accommodated, but more work is required on musical heritage through a range of different positionings. Acknowledging that this work needs to happen is an important step to creating a music industry that is more inclusive of gender and a wide range of musical tastes. The gendered practices in record collecting matter because to both reissue and collect records, one needs the raw material – the material culture – to do so. Considering the discussions on women as consumers, it may also be that many do collect records, but their collections are not considered as such. On a broader level, it means developing the capacity of both female collectors and others to believe that their collections, whether



of records or other items, are worthy of being considered collections and to be taken seriously as a record of cultural memory. In this way, record collections can become a site of gender inclusiveness.

But this article has also been about more than gender and music collections. It speaks to wider debates about women and objects and has directly incorporated feminist questions of material culture into debate – by asking whose music is important, what constitutes a collection, and the implications for the musical canon. Women's music collections can 'unsettle memory' and subvert dominant music memories. The lessons from these object interactions can be applied to broader scopes, and force us to ask what does taking feminist material culture seriously mean for our understanding of both feminist practice and accepted historical narratives, encouraging us to critically interrogate heritage rather than just accepting (MacDonald, 2009: 93). Taking seriously the contributions of a gender diverse community will contribute to embracing gender diversity beyond the scope of musical cultures. Because if people and objects are co-constitutive, if people use objects to define themselves and others, then collecting and consuming are both important in constructing and reflecting these gendered identities.

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