CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL IN MINIATURE: SYMBOLIC AND POLITICAL MEANING OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN DOLL HOUSES

by

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A Thesis
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of
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Constructing the Ideal in Miniature: Symbolic and Political Meaning of Early Twentieth Century American Doll Houses

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my father, mother, and Fiancée. They are the three people who helped me succeed the most. All I can say is thank you all for always lighting my fire when I thought my flame had gone out. And to my dearest friend Kerry and her daughter Harper, thank you for inspiring me every day.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

United States of America ................................................................. U.S.
Smithsonian Arts and Industry Building ................................................ A&I
Smithsonian Museum of American History .......................................... SMAH
CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL IN MINIATURE: SYMBOLIC AND POLITICAL MEANING OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN DOLL HOUSES

Corinne Vigen, M.A
George Mason University, 2018
Thesis Director: Dr. Linda J. Seligmann

This thesis describes how the doll and the house are not just objects of material culture. This paper is based on research focused on twentieth-century doll houses and the homes they were made to represent. By reproducing doll houses into playthings, collectors and manufactures quickly defined and normalized an archetype, that is, a two-story, single family structure for the “ideal” American home. Studying popular doll houses from 1890 to 1940, advice journals (Ladies Home Journal, et al), mass housing projects of the early twentieth-century, we can see how an “acceptable” image of an ideal house emerges in the United States Simultaneously, American museums were being built as public institutions, attempting to reimagine urban areas into cultural spaces. This paper gives a brief history of both museums and the origins of doll houses to help explain how and why these mundane miniature objects became part of present day museum collections. The cultural context of this analysis focuses on the idea of “home” in the
U.S., with reference to cross-cultural and historical comparisons worthy of consideration. However, it is the quintessential, ideal American home, built in miniature, that reproduces symbolic meanings of gender and democracy while never losing touch of its colonial past.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Doll houses and museums both originated from private rooms or armoires known as cabinets of curiosities, often kept by the aristocratic and noble class of Europe. The classic European doll house or baby house was created by seventeenth-century Dutch traders (Glubok 1984; Morris 2014; Mack 2007). Social Scientist John Mack claims that records definitively show the original “emphasis was on authenticity, on precisely faithful reproductions. This was the theme in the production of doll’s [sic] houses in the western world from the start” (2007: 146). Mack goes on to explain that the first recorded doll house was commissioned for a wealthy upper-class male, a Duke from Bavaria. The doll house was an authentic scaled model of the Duke’s personal residence, a four-story estate dating back to 1557-8 (2007: 146). This thesis examines the cultural processes within the home that have taken place in domestic interiors through the development from the doll house’s origin at the end of the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century and focuses on doll houses in museums over that period. This thesis argues doll houses become a symbolic means to project and reflect the cultural processes taking place within the American home.

The cultural subtext of a doll house within the context of a museum exhibit is to “read it” (or to see it) as a model for the communication of certain American ideologies of acceptable or even idealized domestic space. Miniature displays have often replicated
a constructed hegemonic norm for what may be projected as the ideal quality of an aspirational living style: one that communicates from the object to the viewer. Models, such as the doll house, are a type of scale-making. Anthropologist Susan Gal writes that scale is produced through a process dependent on the point of view or ideological perspective of viewers who construct meaning based on their past experiences and their world view (Gal 2016:91). This research found that American museums collected miniature doll houses owned by adult women whose positions in society allowed them the privileges to model their own realities in miniature and display them to the public.

The Victorian era\(^1\) popularized doll houses among the middle class, and it was also when the doll house became part of museum exhibits in an effort to make families with children feel welcomed at the museum (Pasierbska 2014: 121). At the same time, massive housing projects of the early twentieth century witnessed close coordination between government and private companies to produce the ideal American home. The Aladdin Company from Michigan was one example of a made-to-order, prefabricated housing company that received a commission from the government to produce the “ideal cottage” home to be shown at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco (Aladdin Company 1917, reprinted 1995: 4). The cottage that Aladdin produced was a bungalow style, single family home, advertised as “Built in a Day.”

World fairs and international expositions in Britain and Paris showcased houses as evidence of technological and cultural advances that linked the home to symbols of

\(^1\) The Victorian Era was marked by Queen Victoria’s reign in England yet still applied to the cultural hegemony of upper class American culture. Particularly when women’s place in society was similar to the idea of children in museums, that they were like objects, “to be seen but not heard” (Pasierbska 2014: 122).
modernism and nationalism (Sears 2003; Segalen 2001: 78). Sears, Roebuck and Co. also published an advertisement in a 1939 catalog about a full sized- replica of their Mount Vernon model that had gone to the 1932 Paris Exposition (reprinted 2003:1).

If the doll house was evidence of what constituted the ideal home, the basic design it presented was of a single-family, often two-story, home. These miniature homes had, at a minimum, a kitchen, a living room with dining spaces, with private rooms for the adults and children. Depending on the time and culture, certain features of the architecture or interior would change in accordance with what was perceived as accurately representing the (ideal) home. Private and public spaces within the home were often marked by the placement of miniature objects or, if a doll was included, their little bodies were positioned to further illustrate or signal the social behavior or status assigned to the woman in particular. The key is that the miniature represented the true, life size version of the ideal house. This research will show that the miniature doll house throughout history has always reflected, from its creator’s point of view, the ideal homes of her time. The period between 1890-1940 was no exception to this.

**Purpose and Significance**

The doll house, whether made to reproduce reality or simply to toy with fantasy, nevertheless conformed to the unifying properties of a “home.” The time period 1890-1940 in which these doll houses were being constructed, differed considerably from today’s world. As doll houses grew in popularity, this time period provides many visual
representations of the cultural process occurring within the home made visible and preserved in doll houses. Certain aspects of the home (either real or miniature) were just being devised and were not yet available to all socioeconomic classes in the United States. During the creation of many popular doll house collections, mass housing projects of the early twentieth-century had created the notion of what was an “acceptable” house in the U.S. Reproducing this idealized house into popular play-things quickly helped define and normalize the archetype for the ideal American home.

This research has combined visual and symbolic anthropology to tease out the meanings of early twentieth-century doll houses. It has considered hegemonic norms regarding houses, homes, and domesticity; and what doll houses may convey about the power of the miniature. The significance of how the home structures society is not new to anthropology. Many seminal works refer to the sacred, ritual boundaries and behavior within the home (Douglas 1966, 1991; Bourdieu 1970). Doll houses are found in art and history collections in many museums across the U.S. Yet, as this thesis will show, there is little in the way of best practices in displaying a doll house in a museum or critical analysis of museum displays of doll houses. Architectural historian Dianna Harris suggests that items of popular culture (which would certainly include doll houses) are understudied areas of scholarly research that offer critical analysis of the past (2013:83). It is worth noting that miniatures, including doll houses, are not antiquated objects. Museums across the U.S. are still collecting and displaying miniatures in museums, and expanding the scope and placement of life outside the domestic sphere. A growing
number of artists also produce miniature scenes that reimagine reality and toy with trick photography (McFadden 2011).

Research Questions

The major questions that shaped this thesis are centered on the object of the doll house itself and what (or who) is represented by it or in it, as well as asking when the doll house became a museum collected artifact. Specifically, were these doll houses projecting an image of what should be in a home, or did they reflect actual homes already in existence? Was there an interaction between what was given or presented/represented and what was only imagined or aspired to? There are two main spheres in which, doll houses are experienced: within a private living space as a toy and, as a display, in a public museum in a public museum. This thesis is concerned primarily with the latter. The interest in the doll house as a reflection of their cultural values is attested by the longevity of the doll house exhibits which span over a half century all across the United States. Both private and public spaces of interaction are categorically different. The private doll house use is valuable for a different set of sociological and psychological inquiries. However, the public display is more informative about certain aspects that reveal more institutional and social processes wherein the symbolic and political meaning of the house, home and domestic space in twentieth century American culture can be better understood.
The research and sources presented in the following chapters contribute to an analysis of the historical and cultural placement of such mundane objects within museums. The portraits of four collectors presented in chapter four show that the women who donated their collections and helped illustrate these miniature ideal homes were in fact contributing to a hegemonic narrative of the home, produced by the dominant white middle class and reproducing it in miniature. Most of the doll houses found today in the permanent collections of the prominent museums across America were made by women born in the 1800s who were quite affluent. This research found that the reasons for exhibiting doll houses differ from museum to museum, based on the scope of the collection, curatorial decisions, and access to such objects.

Significant information was obtained from curatorial research published by American museums such as the *Smithsonian Museum of American History*, *The Chicago Museum of Fine Arts*, and European museums, such as the *Victoria and Albert Museum* (London), and the *Rijksmuseum* (Amsterdam). Other secondary research included historical and literary research on American homes and décor from 1890-1940. Most of the sources designate this period as the late Victorian era, named after the reign of Queen Victoria of England (1837-1901). Queen Victoria’s daughter-in-law, Queen Mary donated the second doll houses to be added to the *Victoria and Albert Museum’s* collection (Pasierbska 2014: 122). Finally, ethnographies about cultural *habitus*\(^2\) within

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\(^2\) In this Thesis, the term *habitus* is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (1970). Defined here as the embodiment of one’s world view and cultural capital that expresses a dominate aesthetic value based on social not natural qualities (yet they can become naturalized by power inequalities). Bourdieu’s use of the
the home provide some explanation of the features found within the home that then symbolically became reproduced in miniature.

Primary sources provided evidence of the shifting spaces within the home that pointed to more “big-picture” changes in society. Many technological inventions at the turn of the twentieth century conflicted with prevailing social behavior pertaining to demarcations of private and public spaces within the home. Certain inventions, like the automobile, allowed for a greater distance between workplace and home, which then gave rise to the construction of suburban neighborhoods. This development further segregated a portion of the population into more homogeneous neighborhoods based on income and mobility (Harris 2012; Clark Jr. 1986). To connect the model of the house to the miniature model, “advice literature” such as Ladies Home Journal provided the ideology of domesticity that was presented to and consumed by the public. Sources such as advice columns illustrate the “best practice” of housekeeping but also, by omission, it becomes clear what is not included. One could conclude that the people and objects that advertisements of the home and doll houses omitted from the domestic scene were not valued. It is by knowing what is represented, presented, and omitted that permits the viewer to ascertain the hegemonic narrative of the home.

term expands upon Marcel Mauss’s, “Techniques of the Body*” (1935) that claims the body is man’s most natural tool. Habitus and the doll house will be discussed at greater length below.
Outline of Chapters

The following chapter presents a review of the literature on doll house exhibits and their significance in representing the idealized American house/home. It also describes the sources used for this research and the theoretical framework for the thesis. Chapter three is organized into three chronological sections to provide a time line for how and when the ideal home was constructed in the U.S. The history is broken down around the Victorian era when doll houses and modern-day public museums become popular to a growing middle class (Millhauser 1983; Glubok 1984; Morris 2014; Mack 2007; Bird 2010). Chapter three also parallels the history of the museum, house and doll house in the U.S. to help explain why an everyday miniature domestic tableaux ended up in present day museum collections. Note that every museum is different and that every case should be considered individually.

Chapter four is an ethnographic account of four very different miniature collectors. Analyzing these miniatures and the narratives of the women who constructed these dollhouses provided additional insight into how they viewed the world in which they lived and the cultural mores they experienced. The women who crafted and collected these delightful, diminutive domestic spaces grappled with the changing cultural context in which they lived, keeping in mind that all of these collectors came from modest to wealthy socio-economic backgrounds. How can these little homes be used to reveal

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3 Many doll houses were built by a male relative or commissioned by a skilled craftsman. However, the miniature objects were often made by women before mass produced objects could be purchased. Being hand-made denotes higher quality goods and therefore more desirable for the collectors. The collectors from chapter four made most of their own miniatures and often assisted in the construction of the doll houses themselves.
female voices that were often silenced in their own time? In what ways do they display the agency of women expressed within these domestic spaces but suppressed in contexts outside the home? These are the important questions which this thesis will attempt to analyze and perhaps answer.

The fifth chapter consists of the final analysis and conclusion of the thesis. The goal of the thesis is for the reader to have a better understanding of the shared past between doll houses and modern museums. Another goal is to further the understanding that objects on display carry a host of powerful meanings to the viewer that are highly symbolic. The changes observed in modern miniatures displayed in museums further attest to their power.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK, AND METHODS

This chapter positions the existing literature about doll houses and miniatures within broader social theory. It offers a critical reading of the symbolic meanings of the late nineteenth to early twentieth-century doll houses when they came to be displayed within museums. Twentieth-century literature on the house, home, and domesticity from academic fields such as anthropology, American history, and material culture studies, focuses heavily on the life of the middle class. The typical doll houses present and recreate the dominant perception of middle-class Americans around the ideal home. The classification or scale of being in the “middle” would seem to signify the average or perhaps the attainable. The house thus becomes symbolic of the American dream, suggesting homeownership, which

Figure 1 Parker, Cushman. 1930. Bon Ami, Advertisement Illustration, The Saturday Evening Post.
of belonging. The display in a museum context reclassified the object further as "authentic." The dollhouse, neat and organized, is a symbol of "good behavior"; an idealized version of the home as a clean, organized and proper domain (Figure 1).

Steven Millhauser’s article, “The Fascination of the Miniature” (1983), explores the shrunken world of objects crafted and constructed, intimately tied to the imagination and western literature, but not separated from reality. Western literature may have inspired many collectors since many of them were also writers and keep detailed notes about their domestic scenes. Susan Gal and Judith Irvine, respectively, describe the use of scale in miniatures, using linguistic and social categories based on ideological process that would confirm points of view on gender and class (Gal 2016: 91; Irvine 2016: 214). They argue that the scale itself represents a certain point of view. Millhauser adds that size discrepancy is central to the intrigue the object elicits but, still, there are notably different reactions to scale. The miniature, in contrast to the gigantic, is less threatening and has a different more manageable, approachable quality (Millhauser 1983: 129). Therefore, if the miniature is not in isolation, the doll house can serve as data of the material culture of those historical bodies that constructed, reproduced, and maintained these objects of domestic life for the last four hundred years.

The readings that reference doll houses (i.e. miniatures) relate back to literary and historical references and are associated with symbols and meanings behind the perception of things that are tiny, small, insignificant and applied to both domains and bodies. The doll house is more than a miniature world whose only raison d’être is to make us feel “big.” There is no escaping the doll house as a symbolic, literary tool. Long before the
invention of moving pictures, the collective western literary imagination had provided a legacy of fantasizing about other worlds, evident in such works as The Odyssey (1763) and Gulliver’s Travels (1726). The authors of these two works, Homer and Jonathan Swift, respectively fantasize about different societies through epic journeys by the main character (the protagonist or hero). In these literary applications of scale-making (Gal 2016: 91; Irvine 2016: 214 ), the authors effectively marginalize the “other” which are portrayed as miniature, hence inferior to the white male European protagonist in the stories written for a predominantly white European audience.

The Social Life of Things (1986), edited by Arjun Appadurai, provides a multitude of ways to frame research on doll houses as cultural and material objects with use-value. Appadurai and fellow contributor, Igor Kopytoff, developed a concept of object-based research, which includes methods for studying an object’s entire “life” to fully understand how it becomes valued socially and commodified. Kopytoff suggests that a biography of an object-based inquiry should ask similar questions as one might ask of a person: Where do they come from? What is their purpose and placement in society (1986: 66)? These scholars argue that a biography of an object, such as a doll house, is assigned within a time, place, and culture, and that each object within the doll house can have multiple biographies. “A culturally informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories” (Kopytoff 1986: 68). This approach would inform the observation of objects in museums which are replete with symbolic value and may also have biographical histories in which they have traveled or
become commodities in multiple sets of exchanges and attributions of value. This conclusion seems obvious—but only after one stops to think about these facts related to their cultural meaning. Although these chapters are not about research on museum objects or commodification per se, the idea of a museum object or collection as a commodity and its “life” (provenance) offers a means by which to consider the object’s social and symbolic value.

**Symbolic Theory**

In Victor Turner’s *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), about the Ndembu people of Zambia, Turner came to think that people were generally unaware of the symbolic meaning of their various rituals. However, he thought that anthropologists had the methods to illuminate such social meaning through interviews, participant observation, and contextual research. Turner’s observations of ritual symbols and cultural performance required documenting a “series in relation to other ‘events,’ for symbols are essentially involved in social process” (Turner 2001: 273). He argued that the symbol, the smallest unit of ritual, is a factor in social action. This meant that the symbol must relate to human interest, purpose, and act as an end to a means (2001: 273). The dominant symbol of Turner’s study, the “Milk Tree” (*mudyi*), resulted in an action by the society to perform rituals based on the occasion. When asked what the tree symbolized, not everyone gave the same answer. However, the white latex that the tree secretes caused
some to compare it to a woman’s breast milk. This is significant because the Ndembu people are matrilineal, and the powerful associations the tree has with a women’s biological functions confers their social order and structure (2001: 274). The symbolic meaning of milk from a women’s breast to nourish a child could also resemble the life cycle of the Ndembu people as a whole. There are many different interpretations about the tree which becomes a ritual site where men and women separate, and for example, birthing rituals are performed. The bonds of a society are thus tied to these rituals and the place where they occur and hold symbolic meaning is beneath the mudyi.

In western societies the home is a symbol where private bonds and rituals occur between families and across generations. The tree, therefore is an object that both unites and separates (2001: 275). The house, in western society, can also unite and separate--between, male and female, adult and child, public and private, occupant and guest. “At the highest level of abstraction, therefore, the Milk Tree stands for unity and continuity of Ndembu society” (2001:274). Turner argues that when studying symbols, we need to look for meaning (from both novices and specialists), in relation to time, space, and multiple sources of knowledge. For example, in the case of museum displays of doll houses, it would be important to engage with the perspectives of museum visitors (as novices) and with curators and collectors (as specialists).

The doll house is what Victor Turner calls a dominant symbol (Turner 1967: 27) that condenses American values of family and democratic ideals of private space. It is possible to ascertain the social life of objects through a critical interpretation of dollhouses made in America between 1890-1940. This interpretation permits for a better
understanding of how scale and space are used in museums and even the meanings behind domestic interior choices once an object is reproduced in miniature and displayed in museums. This chapter will address the additional cultural processes at work that evidently cause a given object (such as a doll house) to be reproduced in miniature and displayed in a museum. It provides the background to the cultural process that unfolds once objects are (re)produced in miniature and displayed in museums, drawing on anthropological literature concerning the social life of objects (Appadurai 1986), the use of space in museums (Duncan 1995), and even the meanings behind domestic interior choices (Cieraad 1999).

Moving from symbolic theory to a more structural approach to understanding the hegemonic norms produced by the home, the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1970) is helpful. While conducting research in Morocco, Bourdieu noticed the homes of the Berber (Appendix Floor Plan: A) were structured in such a way so as to correspond to the inhabitants’ worldview. In this way “the house is organized [according] to a set of homologous oppositions: fire: water; cooked: raw… male: female; culture: nature…But, in fact, the same oppositions exist between the house and the rest of the universe” (Bourdieu 1970:157). This would imply cultural meaning could be observed if the habitus reconstructed in the doll house that claims historical accuracy also reflects the habitus of the creator’s worldview. The symbolic meaning in the physical layout of the Kabyle (Berber or North African) house represents and structures the inhabitants’ worldview (and daily lives) by how the home is divided along an axis of east: west, dark: light, which are female: male oppositions.
As linguistic anthropologist William F. Hanks explains Bourdieu’s theory; “the stability of the habitus is not expressed in rules, which Bourdieu rejects, but in habits, dispositions to act in certain ways, and schemes of perspectives that order individual’s perspectives along socially defined lines” (2005:69). Therefore, the habits inside a house should be expressed in the physical structuring of space within the house, perhaps shared along cultural, and most likely, economic, lines. The house is a physical nexus between the symbolic world and human interaction with space and meaning. Dollhouses support this symbolic and human interaction between space, meaning and reproduction of the house in the western miniatures. One phenomenon that became an apparent signal in the habitus of the home in miniature was the kitchen and nursery that almost always appear as diagonal rooms in a doll house. Those two rooms are females spaces but they are never above or beside each other.

The kitchen in particular has almost universally been marked as a female space within the home. Doll houses reproduce a worldview that confirms a women’s place in the kitchen as either belonging to the wife or hired domestic help- never a place occupied by the homeowner who is usually male. Floor plans (Appendix Floor Plan: B, C &D) of real homes between 1890 -1940 indicate that kitchens were usually situated at the rear of the house. Perhaps this would allow bedrooms and living spaces to catch more light and ventilation associated with good health. Still, these details are often replicated in miniature. The kitchen placement change appeared in both doll houses as well as real houses. However in the cross-section view of a doll house the rear of the house where the kitchen would be is found on the first floor. Floor plans of homes from both the Aladdin
Company and Sears and Roebuck also indicate the existence and suggestion for a service entrance located off the kitchen in the private rear of the home. The floor plans indicate the social changes that by the middle of the twentieth century when domestic service declined, the middle class housewife didn’t need to sneak around to the back of the house. At that point the kitchen appears to move to different spaces in the home such as the front, near the only entrance.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century the nursery becomes another female space that first made an appearance in bourgeois upper-class doll houses. Not until the twentieth century did middle class homes begin to include a nursery or space for children when changing perceptions of child rearing were encouraged in ladies magazines and advice journals. Once the nursery became a norm for middle class houses, a nursery was also added to the doll house. The micro miniature doll houses within the miniature doll house emerges as a signal to the observer that this is a natural placement of such an object and encourages more children and mothers to own one.

Take for example a collector from the portraits of four collectors, Faith Bradford, who positioned her doll house kitchen in the middle of the of the first floor (Figure 2). The kitchen is in the center, located between the butler’s pantry to the left, and food pantry to the right. The other rooms on the first floor are the dining room located at the far left corner. Usually, the most common location for a doll house kitchen is located on the first level and more often a right or left corner. Here the layout signals the dolls’ behavior and deepens the observations allowing the viewer to playout the habitus of the doll in the space presented. The butler, “Gadsby,” stands in his pantry which is located
between adjoining doors leading from the dining room to the kitchen. The female cook, “Martha” is in the pantry associating a woman the domestic role in the home with the food preparation, storage and the right corner is the laundry room. The nursery is located on the top floor diagonal to the kitchen.

Figure 2 The Miniature World of Faith Bradford. Photographed 2010. Smithsonian Museum of American History. Exhibit ongoing

Social Critique of the Museum

The Enlightenment brought about the idea of public engagement with the arts and sciences, but it was in the Victorian era that the idealism of the democratization of museums along with other formal public institutions became central (McClellan 2008). Anthropologists have contributed to the debates and critiques of museum practices such
as the for-profit ethics of some museums or the reproduction of western ideologies by embedding them within displays of non-western cultures. Part of Franz Boas’ legacy in museum display practices is the idea that objects are not created in a cultural or historical vacuum but by inspiration and invention drawn from the environment and circumstances. This is even the case for children’s toys. They exist in a context that gives them historical relevance. For example, three toys, *The Erector Set, Lincoln Logs,* and *Legos* all became possible after the invention of prefabricated materials, originally invented for quicker home building (Bergdoll and Christianson 2008: 54,55,67). These toys were marketed to encourage children (mostly boys) to build, but they all lack an interior “domestic” space.

In the case of miniature doll houses, domestic realities combined with the diminutive size, create a liminal state of wonder and awe that can provoke emotional responses. These little homes afford their owner a sense of control over a small world unbound by any borders, the only limits being their imagination. Is it merely the scale alone that continues to capture the imagination of everyone from the casual onlooker to the avid collector? Clearly, the concept of the doll house, in its positioning and impact, incorporates aspects of gender identity, decorative arts, children’s play and pedagogy. The latter was closely intertwined with particular ideologies and desirable cultural values.

Carol Duncan’s work in *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (1995) helps explain why constructed spaces such as museums continue to be places of exclusion. Museums were once thought to be spaces designed to produce ideal citizens: “[a]s implied by the museum, this visitor was, at its most ideal, a self-improving, autonomous, politically empowered [and therefore male] individual who enters the
museum in search of moral and spiritual enlightenment…and thereby ritually assumes this identity” (Duncan 1995: 49). Ethnic diversity, immigration, and lower socio-economic classes seemed to threaten wealthy, upper class white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, conservative values. “Yet, no matter how exclusive their practices, American public art museums would have to appear inclusive and democratic in order to effectively symbolize community and define national identity” (Duncan 1995: 57).

In The Love of Art Museums and Their Public (L'Amour de l'art. Les musées et leur public) Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel (1966) paint a word picture of the demographics of museum audiences of the time, based on their review of empirical data. Their findings were not a total shock, given the history of modern day collections. They found that the overwhelming number of those visiting museums belonged to the “cultivated class,” upper class, or bourgeois and that these groups far outnumbered those from the working class. Following his work in Morocco, Andrew McClellan writes, “Bourdieu explained this social imbalance in terms of habitus- a superior access to the codes of art appreciation and rituals of museum-going available to the upper classes through education and upbringing” (2008: 178). Bourdieu applied the idea of habitus to most of his published works, perhaps due to the relevance of his theory for understanding class itself; habitus also plays a role in the reproductive strategies of maintaining class divides. The main claim of The Love of Art (1966) was that art appreciation starts at a young age; those who are of a higher class begin to go to museums as a family; and the class divide is therefore reproduced between those who go to museums and those who do not.
James Clifford in his Epilogue to *Objects and Others* (1985) reflects upon prior work that has addressed western collection practices and museum display techniques as part of a broader western tradition of classification. He claims that “whether a child collects model dinosaurs or dolls, sooner or later she or he will be encouraged to keep the possessions on a shelf, in a special box, or to set up a doll house” (Clifford 1985:238). These objects, once organized in collections, begin to form meanings and project certain ideologies. Clifford references Susan Stewart who argues that the doll house developed from miniature Christmas crèches from Europe in the Middle Ages (Stewart 1984:61). These crèches, however, focused on exterior space in which a sacred event occurred, whereas the late sixteenth century Dutch miniatures were authentic interior domestic reproductions (1984:61).

Clifford goes on to write that “in [Stewart’s] analysis, the miniature, whether a portrait or doll’s house, enacts a bourgeois longing for inner experience;” Clifford further states “she shows how collecting.. most notably in the museum.. creates the illusion of adequate representation of a world by first cutting objects out of specific contexts (whether cultural, historical, or intersubjective) and making them ‘stand for’ abstract wholes” (Clifford 1985:239). Clifford (1985:239) argues that this is one “crucial process of western identity formation,” which the museum display reproduces. Beyond the need to classify and display, Stewart argues that the two themes the doll house confers are “wealth and nostalgia” (1985:61). The doll houses presented in the four portraits of collectors were reproductions of what the women sought to capture about domestic life either by commissioning, consuming or crafting their own miniatures. Colleen Moore’s
fairy tale castle resembled her life and experiences as a film actress. Her life in Hollywood, the land of make believe produced the archetype for her paracosm that she wished to share with the public, whereas Frances Glessner Lee led a sheltered life and had a deep passion for crime novels intended to show the darker side of life inside the home, and expose the violence that often went unsolved by male detective’s unconscious bias. These four collectors are evidence that each doll house is made by individuals influenced by their own circumstances and in such a way they become unique creations.

A Visual Anthropology Approach to Doll Houses

Mary Bouquet (2000) reviews the practice of scripting exhibitions and reviews anthropological theories that include discussions of the “grammar of space.” Bouquet describes the incorporation of anthropological theory in museum practices (Bouquet 2000) with a more specific discussion of visual methods (Bouquet 2012). Her main argument is that the shaping of knowledge in museum displays is not unlike ethnographic writing practices, which are also socially and culturally constructed and carefully crafted, yet museum displays have received far less critical attention (2000: 219). Bouquet also discusses an example of the grammar of space by Carol Duncan (1995), who describes how a museum’s architecture can produce a liminal state for visitors. Arguably the doll house could also be seen as a grammar of architectural space in miniature which signals to the viewer the layout and habitus of the home.
When analyzing an object on display, Stephanie Moser (2010) like Bouquet, calls attention to layout and intention. “While often seen as ‘props,’” details such as lighting, display furniture, and spatial arrangement function as devices that work together to create an environment within which visitors gain understandings of culture, history, and science, as well as concepts such as “civilization,” “progress,” “race,” and “gender” (Moser 2010: 23). In my thesis research, the construction of space (Douglas 1991: 288-290) given to doll houses in museums (and also within the doll house) will be integral to assessing their cultural value along with analyzing data collected on doll houses that later become a part of museum collections.

Marcus Banks critically examines the growing subfield of visual anthropology, stating that it “is coming to be understood as the study of visible cultural forms, regardless of who produced them or why” (Banks 2006: 8). Banks adds some “constraints” that these images must “seek to mediate the gap between the ‘big picture’... and local forms...” (2006:8). He stipulates that, for images to be useful in ethnographic research, they must be critically examined through scientific methods that should be able to be replicated. For example, Susan Broomhall created a table to convey the observable visual data that is helpful when comparing multiple dollhouses to identify patterns and norms that could signify social, historical, or cultural meanings (2006: 47–67). The doll house is a form of visual culture and the historical changes that can be witnessed such as the placement, absences or reproduction of certain rooms signal the value and meaning of the space to the people who created them.
Another visual anthropologist, Sarah Pink, states that “[w]hen ethnographers produce photographs or video, these visual texts, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic knowledge” (Pink 2007:17). Together, visual methods from Pink and Banks assisted in ascribing a critical analysis for observing doll houses, the people who made them, and the way museums display them. Pink argues that “[r]ather than being a method for the collection of ‘data’, ethnography is a process of creating and presenting knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on the ethnographers’ [sic] own experience” (Pink 2007: 18). Unfortunately, in this case the creators of these historic dollhouses have died. Nevertheless, many of them provided detailed summaries and narratives for their work that has often been published by museum curators (Bird 2010; Bradford 1977; Jacobs 1978).

Once a photograph is taken, it takes on a life of its own. The photographer or ethnographer can no longer control the entire content or interpretation of the viewer. The same holds true for the doll house. Pink states that “[a]ny experience, action, artifact, image or idea is never definitively just one thing [sic] but may be redefined differently in different situations, by different individuals and in terms of different discourse” (Pink 2007: 19). As Pink and Banks both attest, photographs are not intrinsically ethnographic. Images often require context and it is necessary that their function be for the purpose of a better understanding of the human condition. Perhaps doll houses with the proper context can help better understand the human condition of women from the past, long forgotten beyond their value in recreating female domestic spaces. In the portraits of four collectors presented in this thesis, the lives of the collectors are trapped hidden behind their crafted
miniature homes. Yet their titles outside the home included but were not limited to; actress, financier, writer, librarian, journalist, editor, and sponsor of legal medicine. Why is it that their placement in a museum was only for their doll house?

**Methods and Sources**

This thesis research was based on data collected during the last three months of 2017. Archival research of primary sources on early twentieth-century housing information and imagery provided historical and architectural data on: catalog model floor plans, women's magazine “advise” and advertisements, doll house readings, and museum publications from past exhibits. The floor plans come from two companies that made mail-to-order homes around the same period as dollhouse exhibits became popular. Those mail-to-order homes were *Sears, Roebuck, and Co.* (1913, 1939), and *Aladdin and Company* (1917). Readings on houses and especially doll houses tended to focus on women. Therefore, research sought to demonstrate how gender was/is constructed within American homes and reproduced in miniature, while in some cases subverting those very gender norms in the process.

The objects sampled for this research were miniature doll houses that have been well documented and shared with the public. They had to be made predominantly in the United States between 1890 and 1940. The collectors also had to qualify for analysis based on their involvement in the crafting or construction of most of their own
miniatures. Four collectors were chosen based on these qualifications. The four miniature dollhouse collectors that are discussed in chapter four are Faith Bradford, Flora Gill Jacobs, Colleen Moore, and Frances Glessner Lee. The legacies of these four women will forever be associated with their dollhouses.

Mark S. Morris explains doll house play in terms of a paracosm. Morris defines paracosm as a “detailed and consistently structured imaginary world with its own geography, weather, customs and into adulthood as a personal creative laboratory” (Morris 2014: 71). The doll house collections observed in this research are not only personal reflections of what the collectors valued or aspired to; they are also what they knew and experienced in their own life. The accounts retold in chapter four are attempts to venture into the paracosms of Bradford, Jacobs, Moore and Lee.

The next chapter will present data collected on American houses, museum practice and the application of scale to discern the symbolism, meanings, and ideologies conveyed by these doll houses.
CHAPTER THREE: HOW THE DOLL HOUSE BECAME A MUSEUM ARTIFACT

The doll house holds symbolic meaning for the person who constructed it and for the one who possesses it—becoming the collector’s interpretation of the attainable dream of a middle-class home in the U.S. By the 1940s adult miniature collections became popular exhibits at American museums focusing on idealized domestic interiors (Bird 2010: 33). How did the doll house come to stand as the paradigm of an ideal home in the United States by the early twentieth century that eventually led to its incorporation into American museum exhibits? This chapter is dedicated to understanding the process of the doll house transitioning from an adult object of amusement to a children’s plaything, and then finally to a public museum artifact. This process began over four years prior to the collections that will be highlighted in chapter four. We have left to one side many particulars here in order to focus on the context of the museum, the doll house and the ideal home in the U.S. and consider both how they differ and what they have in common. The most critical developments across all areas occurred during the Victorian period. Therefore, selected and relevant sections of history presented below will be grouped as having taken place either before, during or after the Victorian period (1837-1901). The events in question highlight the ideological processes that worked together to produce what was considered by the dominant culture to be the normative American domestic life-style.
The Pre-Victorian Era (1550s-1830s)

Inspired by the Renaissance, western collections and museums began in Europe with the *Wunderkammer* or *Kunstkammer*, translated as a cabinet of wonders or a cabinet of curiosity, respectively. These extensive private collections grew during the sixteenth century which was the age of exploration and colonial expansion. Display practices were often “unsystematic and idiosyncratic in composition;” order and classifications were based solely on collector’s discretion (Ames 1986: 38). Whether the *Wunderkammer/Kunstkammer* was an actual cabinet or an entire room sufficient in size to contain the collection, it was filled with natural and man-made wonders acquired to reflect the fascination of their owner and to symbolize to others the owner’s power over the world (Ames 1986: 7).

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europe and North America had experienced scientific, intellectual and social revolutions. These revolutions led to economic class restructuring and many private collections were appropriated by nation-states which turned them into public museums. The nation-states thereby hoped to use them in helping to construct a new national identity (Bouquet 2012:34). An example of this is the *Louvre*, which was opened to the public after the French Revolution. After the Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte wanted Paris to be the art and intellectual capital of the world (McClellan 2008: 159-161). Napoleon therefore took what nobles had hidden away
for their own amusement or gratification and made these things publicly available through a great and grand public museum.

Eventually, more private collections grew unmanageable in size and required too much maintenance and expense. The solution to this problem was to establish a public trust, thus creating the foundation for more national collections. At the same time, museums in Europe were beginning to be purposefully built as public trusts with more specialized collections, dividing art from natural history and ethnography. Museums in the United States grew more slowly. One of the first to open, between 1786 and 1810, was a gallery that was filled with both art and items of natural history. It was, indeed, a veritable cabinet of curiosity; owned and operated out of the home of an American painter, Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827). After Peale retired, his little, private museum closed and the collection was disbursed (Hart and Ward 1988: 404-412).

Around the 1840s, showman and businessman P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) bought some of the Peale collection. Barnum’s vision was to liven up the curiosities for audiences in a for-profit entertainment circus (Hart and Ward 1988: 412). The first, uphill battle for modern museums was the move from private to public access and display; the second problem, represented by P.T. Barnum and others, was the for-profit entertainment side of the “curiosities” that belittled efforts to provide the public with factual scientific and educational knowledge. In contrast, as museums became increasingly more professional they took their institutional task seriously with the stated mission to educate and provide factual knowledge to the public (Bouquet 2012:12).
Paralleling the history of these cabinets of curiosity, doll houses also originated in sixteenth century Europe (Glubok 1984: 1). Historian Shirley Glubok has written a book about miniature doll houses using illustrations of them to examine interior objects and discussing the historical accuracy with which they depict period homes. She begins with the similarities to curio cabinets since many of the original baby houses were fashioned from armoires or wardrobes. By the seventeenth century, however, they would lose the cabinet legs and become objects that could sit on tables or on the floor (Glubok 1984: 29).

One of the first documented baby cabinet houses was commissioned in Munich, Germany for the Duke of Bavaria, Albert V (1528-79). The so-called “Munich Baby House,” crafted in 1557, was an authentic reproduction of Albert’s estate, made for the private amusement of adults. As a prominent Catholic during the Protestant Reformation, Albert V would have been against the cultural changes taking place in Germany. Because Bavarian craftsmen produced the oldest doll houses known to exist, Nuremberg Germany would become known as the “toy capital of the world.” The oldest doll house in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection in London is, in fact, called the “Nuremberg Baby House” with the date, 1673, scratched into the chimney (Pasierbska 2014: 30). This simple house differed significantly from the Duke’s estate. It is thought to have been owned by a Lutheran, as there is a print of Martin Luther’s image plastered on the door that swings open. The more simple style of the Nuremberg house lost its cabinet legs and facade for a more practical, four-room, box-like appearance that became the norm (Pasierbska 2014: 30-36).
The first account we have of a woman commissioning a doll house dates from before the Nuremberg house mentioned above. Anna Köferlin, a childless widow, had a doll house made for use as a public display in 1631 to show to women and children and teach them domestic virtues (Chen 2014: 279; Broomhall 2007:50). Köferlin may be one of the pioneers in doll houses made by or for women’s and children's domestic training and general household edification\(^4\). The Nuremberg house kitchens were part of the “best kitchen” (additional examples in the Victorian era), which displayed all the copper and metal appliances, cookware and serving ware (Glubok 1984: 33). By the mid-seventeenth century, women who could afford the leisure time began to amuse themselves with doll houses and focused more on the domestic, interior space. By the mid-eighteenth century, new materials become available to make cheaper and more mass produced and durable miniatures that children were encouraged to use. Also at this time, European doll houses were beginning to be collected but not yet displayed. While all of these doll houses were being built and collected as miniature ideal versions of European domestic realities, the United States ideal had not yet been realized.

The Protestant Reformation helped to spark the Scientific Revolution which would be critical to social changes in Europe that would eventually lead to exploring the “new world.” European’s began exploratory expeditions to the Americas for resources and wealth. After long years of establishing colonies in the new world, Americans finally came to the point where they broke away and formed a nation of their own. While

\(^4\) Köferlin published a broadside that advertised her doll house could be instructional to all children. However, as the emphasis was on domestic training, young girls who needed the skills were the primary audience.
extolling the idea of democracy and freedom for themselves, the truth is they had stolen
the land from indigenous people and imported people from Africa as chattel property.

The first houses in the U.S. began with the settlement of Jamestown in 1601. Houses in the United States built after Jamestown and before the Victorian period were simple structures that resembled those found in the nations that colonists emigrated from, partly because they brought particular construction skills from European countries. Many homes were made from the lumber they cut along the east coast (Harper 2012:10). Land and home ownership were restricted to free white males who had the privileges of voting and participating in political life. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth century the country expanded its territory westward, building along the way ranches, prairie “sod” homes, and log cabins with each colonial settlement symbolically marked by homes. By the nineteenth century simple and affordable single-family homes like the bungalow had become popular and proliferated in the twentieth century. The most individual and aesthetically pleasing homes were Victorian ones with their personal touches that became a statement of the owner’s wealth, sense of beauty, and pride of place.

The Victorian Era (1837 -1901)

By the Victorian era in the U.S., museums had become public, but they were still, in many ways, limited venues intended for the upper class. For example, not only was there an entrance fee; they were also not open on Sundays, the one day of the week when most working class individuals would be able to visit. Museum exhibits had limited
labels explaining the item(s) on display so the uneducated laborer might be dissuaded from ever going again. Also, strict norms of proper behavior and dress had to be respected to enter a museum (McClellan 2008: 155, 159, 169). Museums during the Victorian era also had a major battle to fight in differentiating science and education from mere entertainment value, especially since the museums needed the resources of the public to keep their doors open. Fortunately, at this time, James Smithson (1765-1829), a British man, bequeathed his entire fortune to the U.S Congress. Smithson was a chemist and mineralogist and the illegitimate son of the first Duke of Northumberland. He never married and had no children. In his will he stipulated that his fortune, which came from his mother’s side, should go to an American nephew. If, however, that nephew died and was without issue, then it should all go toward the founding of a museum in Washington, D.C., “for the increase and diffussion of knowledge among men [sic]”. The nephew died childless and in 1847, the first Smithsonian museum opened, paid for by a man who, though he had traveled extensively in the world, had never once set foot in the United States (Childs 2011).

European museums began collecting historical doll houses during the Victorian era before museums in the U.S. Doll houses were either bought or donated to the museums (Pasierbska 2014:121-3). Doll houses preserved displays of bourgeois domestic life which was viewed as being threatened by the growing divisions between classes, even as the middle class was itself, also growing. At this same time, many Victorian museums began to fund anthropological expeditions abroad to document the domestic lives of people around the world. The anthropologists heading up these expeditions made
meticulous field notes, recording what they discovered and building an archive of people's everyday lives. One of these expeditions, whose mission was to preserve disappearing cultures, was Franz Boas’s (1858-1942) to the Arctic. His expedition was funded and he was employed by a museum. His seminal work would later influence more holistic display practices of culture. When in the Arctic, Boas noted children playing with miniatures and reenacting adult behaviors to mimic adult activities in domestic imaginative play (Park 1998: 274).

Around this time, doll houses become a popular “middle class” toy advertised in ladies’ magazines (Morris 2014; Green: 48,53). Morris adds that they were borrowed from the German model made a decade earlier (in Nuremberg) for the edification of women (Morris 2014: 61). Victorian doll houses contained so much detail, just like the actual, real houses they modeled. These doll houses had electricity, real glass, working door bells, etc. (Jacobs 1978). They also still uncritically mirrored the service class society of maids, butlers and cooks, where spaces were clearly demarcated; men had their spaces that women and children were not to enter. These doll houses were super individualized, personalized structures. In the Victorian era, women showed their class and wealth through things like their clothing, jewelry, heels and corsets. Although they were restrictive, they were designed to make them look beautiful and no one could imagine the ladies of the household doing housework in such outfits (Green 1983:86, 130-131).

The kitchen, in particular, became so important that one-room models were made in the Netherlands, Germany, and England. These “best kitchens,” came fully equipped
with all the trimmings necessary to learn their functions and placement. In the nineteenth century, they were imported from the United States, keeping the name “Nuremberg Kitchen,” from the place where they originated from in Germany (Glubok 1984: 30-33; Jacobs 1978: 62-69). Flora Gill Jacobs, one of the collectors who will be discussed in chapter four, was an expert on the subject. In one of her publications on Victorian doll houses, she included more details and illustrations of the original “Nuremberg Kitchen” and also wrote about how the trend continued with the “Victorian Kitchen,” the “South Jersey Kitchen,” “Late Victorian German Kitchen” and the “Tin Kitchen”; All of these, some of which even came with cookbooks, she argued, were educational tools for young children and women (Jacobs 1978: 62-699).

During the Victorian period, the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed in 1865, abolishing slavery. For many white Protestants, the country was then industrializing and growing in prosperity. The single-family home at that time became a symbol of the middle-class ideal in the United States (Clark 1986: 103). Previously, zoning laws were thought unnecessary because first slavery and then sharecropping debts kept most people out of the housing market. This meant that the wealthy and the truly middle classes could build their homes and neighborhoods wherever they wanted without fear of who their neighbors might be. However, after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, free but disenfranchised, African Americans began to migrate around the country looking for their own version of home. Reconstruction would alter the landscape economically and socially in urban and suburban settings in the U.S. but the reconstruction era did not last very long, historically speaking. Soon, segregation by race
became accepted, especially but not exclusively in the South, and greatly affected social inequalities, disproportionately discriminating against the non-white population. It affected their schools, places of worship and their opportunities for quality housing and the parts of town where they could expect to live. The suburbs later became an answer in crowded urban areas for those seeking to become “[the] ideal homeowner” (Marsh 1989:511). The suburbs promoted an image of a homogenous white community using space and a lexicon of “middle class” that implied whiteness (Harris 2013: 59-109). Indeed, real estate agents and banks literally created what they called “red lines,” delineating areas where no persons of color would be allowed to settle.

The suburbs produced more than spatial markers that divided people by race. Margaret Marsh writes there were two ideologies that developed independently, but by the end of the Victorian era they merged. These were the “suburban ideology” relating to men and the “ideology of domesticity” that came to bind women to their biological ability to build and nurture the family (Marsh 1989:506). The calculation seemed to be women = family = home. Green and others write that women through the home became guardians of morality (1983: 7). Symbolically, aspects of cleanliness and organization could be seen reshaping the home physically. An example of this was when light became associated with health; this seemed to dictate that old Victorian wallpaper and window coverings needed to be changed out and replaced with washable [=clean] materials (Green 1983:59). Space within Victorian floor plans was often delineated by the placement of walls, windows, and doors. These borders were later broken down, both physically and metaphorically, by the middle of the twentieth century with the

**Post-Victorian Era (1990s)**

By the twentieth century a number of changes in museums came about. One was a stronger push for education as an important part of a museum’s social mission. Others were how displays and dioramas evolved, with categories that reflected the scientific taxonomy applied in natural history. More holistic cultural displays were attempted but it was not until the end of the twenty-first-century before racist and sexist tropes were eliminated or avoided. There was still much that needed to be one at the time to modernize and formalize museum practices but doll houses were becoming incorporated into museum displays or charity events (Bird 2010: 33). The growth and incorporation of anthropology into museum practice had pushed museums to more formally collect and study that which they deemed to be “exotic”. Bronisław Malinowski’s fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, published in the Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922), would usher in a new era of epistemological, ethnographic practices which then pushed many anthropologists out of museum collections research and into the field to conduct more participant observations (Segalen 2001). By the mid-twentieth-century, it became institutional practice for museums to incorporate more social theories into display techniques (Clifford 1985; Bouquet 2001).
For example, Franz Boas, while working at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, changed the way cultures were displayed in museums. Boas wanted to move the museum away from existing practices that were based on ethnocentric nineteenth-century lineal evolution models which the social sciences were already but slowly moving away from (Jenkins 1994: 268). Boas represented other cultures in a more holistic way, he abandoned past practices of using one object to stand for a whole culture. In this case, the doll houses does not represent all American culture, but rather what was projected in museum displays as an ideal home which appeared to be deeply rooted and institutionalized within the architecture of the home symbolizing the ideal homeowner.

By the twentieth-century doll houses were mass produced and widely popular. The Queen of England made headlines donating a massive doll house to the London museum along with others she had collected (Pasierbska 2014:122). This sparked more interest in the hobby for adult women who continued to collect and display their little worlds at home. Doll houses expand in material and style becoming affected by economic depression and wartime efforts that rationed certain materials, making them inaccessible altogether.

No “current events” are displayed within the early twentieth century doll house world, unlike Martin Luther’s portrait appearing in the Nuremberg house during the Protestant Reformation. These early twentieth century doll houses appear to remain unaffected by politics. Perhaps this is due to women and children's place being considered outside political life. Only religion finds its way into the house by way of
small symbolic references through objects such as “the Lord’s prayer” above a bed, a cross or rosary by a bedside table, or a bible on a shelf (Bradford 1977:25). Christian doll houses comprised the majority of those available for commercial sale and found in museum displays. Children's doll houses take on more simplistic forms, with painted backdrops requiring children to select only a few pieces of furniture. The furniture becomes a marker of a room and allows children more room for imagination. This is the style adopted by popular companies in the U.S. like *Playskool* and *Playmobil* (Morris 2014).

In the U.S., the ideal home was imagined, constructed and projected in consistent ways over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The pages of a plethora of mail order magazines and home journals demonstrate growing trend (Green 1983; Clark 1986; Moroney 2016; Marsh 1989). By the end of the 1900s, Green writes, the ideal middle-class home was a freestanding, single family suburban home (Green 1983:93; Clark 1986:238). While women and the family continued to be the center of the home, Victorian details went out, simple, clean living came in; everything should be able to be cleaned and easily maintained. More space for children in the house and yard was provided. And private backyards became more popular (Harris 2013:149-151). This went hand in hand with changing perceptions of childhood, coupled with prolonged adolescence and more education on child rearing. These trends towards more attention on children in the home stand in stark contrast to the attitudes prevalent in the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, spaces like the nursery were for childhood development and imaginative play and often included a doll house (Pasierbska 2014: 21).
The rapid growth of the middle class and racial segregation continued apace until the middle of the twentieth century. As mentioned above, the suburbs were a major invention of the late Victorian era and continued to grow. By the middle of the 1900s, bureaucratic institutions like the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) produced more order and regulations for building houses and neighborhoods (Harris 2013: 36-37). After WWII, the FHA contributed to institutionalizing models for housing segregation that negatively affected bank loans for many Americans who were persons of color. The FHA “denied African-American G.I.’s access to their benefits and to the new educational, occupational, and residential opportunities” (Brodkin Sacks 1998:91). These are just some of the social and housing legacies left behind as a result of the domestic ideal that so many cherished and unwittingly, doll houses came to reproduce as innocent, nostalgic childhood memories. Although politics were not part of doll house their contextual realities were shaped by the point of view and experience of the owner. Therefore housing politics would have affected the narrative produced by the doll house once placed in a public museum that are only representing a fraction of the population.

Conclusion

Miniatures are found all over the world in forms such as paintings, sculptures, texts, embroidery, carvings, and even micro-miniatures (Mack 2007:19). In the case of miniature doll houses, domestic realities combined with diminutive size creates a liminal state of wonder and awe reflecting an idealized form of reality. The house built in
miniature reproduces symbolic meanings of gender (through objects placement) and democracy (through the architecture) while never losing touch with its colonial past. The history of doll houses in both public and private settings that has been presented in this chapter centered only (or mostly on white) European and American museums and doll houses. In both the case of the doll house and museum, the U.S. has emulated the “superior” European models. The museum was first a Renaissance ideal, as Andrew McClellan notes they were meant to be, “a microcosm of the macrocosm, and a symbol of a harmonious, well-ordered society” (McClellan 2008:16). Museums as a microcosm for the public to learn more about the world around them would not be accessible to a democratic republic in the U.S. until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Doll houses were a microcosm of domestic life and women became masters of this domain centuries before their right to participate in the macro world of political life.

The concept of the doll house, in its positioning and impact, incorporates aspects of gender identity, decorative arts, children’s play, and pedagogy. The latter was closely intertwined with particular ideologies and desirable cultural values. Many authors write that the interest in doll houses has continued due to the power these little homes afford their owner, giving her (or him) a sense of control over a small world unbound by any borders, the only limits being their imagination. However, the construction and representation of miniature worlds prior to the twenty-first century never included conflict, disorder or death. These miniature worlds, it appears, were bound to idealized reproductions of beauty, more than the truth.
CHAPTER FOUR: PORTRAITS OF FOUR COLLECTORS

The word hobby has its origin as a derivative of the word 'hobbyhorse'. The word hobbyhorse was first used in 1816 and referred to a child's toy; a wooden horse that could rock but didn’t really go anywhere. Soon afterwards, a shortened form of the word, ‘hobby,’ came to be applied to other leisure activities like bike riding, or archery that, like the toy wooden horse, didn't really amount to anything serious, but was nonetheless amusing. The Victorian period was an exciting time for leisure sports and other pleasant, recreational activities which grew in popularity. Many of these pastimes were outdoor activities and which could be engaged in by both men and women together. In this same period, more genteel hobbies were encouraged for ladies working alone or in the company of other ladies in the home, such as crafting, sewing, scrapbooking and other indoor activities (Green 1983, 147).

Victorian notions in the 1900s imagined women to possess fragile dispositions and therefore that they were not truly “safe” in public spaces without a man to guide them. The Victorian ethos sought to emphasize that a women’s natural (and moral) place in society was within the safety of the home (Clark 1986: 42-45; Marsh 1989: 508). Women who did occupy public spaces were suspected of having bad morals. Victorians also thought that women's activities should cultivate beauty, and so art and music entered

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the home through the agency of women and the talents they acquired in pursuit of beauty and in faithfully fulfilling the role in society assigned to them (Green 1946: 93, 107).

The early twentieth-century served as a time of awakening for women to question these domestic norms and push their boundaries beyond the home. Many women in the U.S. wanted more from life than the limited and restricting roles which earlier times had assigned to them. The four collectors highlighted below are mostly women who were born before 1900. They all found and achieved recognition outside the home, but, ironically, their fame came to them through their collections of homes, reproduced in miniature. In that world, they were in total control (Morris 2014; Chen 2014: 284).

**Portrait Study One: The Doll House Collection of Colleen Moore**

Colleen Moore (Neé Kathleen Morrison, from Michigan), was a famous Hollywood actress of the 1920s. On screen, Moore was well known for her roles in silent films where she was credited with helping to popularize the flapper look (Fowler 1988). The style featured a short "bobbed" haircut, loose-fitting dresses that came just over the knee (but not all the way to the floor, as in previous times) and hung suggestively off the hips. Essentially, flappers were characterized as women who acted more like men (by drinking and smoking in public). But, more importantly, they were women who dared to occupy public spaces with the same freedom as men did. Flappers were a new generation's reaction to stringent Victorian ideals for women. Colleen Moore, though, just considered the flapper to be an image of the typical "American girl" (Fowler 1988).
Outside the film industry, however, Moore was a casual, down-to-earth woman who was a published writer, scrapbook maker and investor in the stock market. She also advised other women to do the same in one of her publications, *How Women Can Make Money in the Stock Market* (1969). Even as a woman, during the Depression, Moore was unusually wealthy (thanks to the craze for movies which resulted in thousands of “movie houses” being built in just about every city in America), and also quite industrious (Hastie 2001:117). When the movies began to introduce speaking roles, Moore, like many other silent screen stars, found her career in film fading. Her passion project then became working with miniatures. After collecting doll houses as a child, in her early retirement Moore began work on a miniature doll house designed for adults to play with. Beginning in 1928, Moore spent seven years building her doll house. It was a mansion in the shape of a fairy castle. With her connections in the industry, the castle was built with the help of movie set designers she knew. When her project was complete, it toured the U.S. and Canada raising money for a children’s charity. It was often on display at department stores (Hastie 2001:118). The *Chicago Museum of Science and Technology* was the final stop on the tour, and later she donated the doll house to the permanent collection in 1949 (“Museum Fact Sheet” sec. n.d.).

Today, as an "on-going" exhibit at the *Chicago Museum of Science and Technology*, the artifact, at nine square feet and containing 1,500 miniatures, stands protected behind glass. The doll house cost, nearly $500,000 at the time of its creation. In today’s currency, that is equivalent to roughly 7.3 million dollars. This object, however, is actually priceless in part because of the amount of personal jewelry Moore repurposed.
into furniture or decoration within the castle. With no biological children of her own, this house inherited the majority of Moore's time and wealth. The house also includes mini books for her library penned by famous authors, which can actually be read. The Museum website lists authors John Steinbeck and Agatha Christie among the most popular of her friends to contribute mini books to her masterpiece. The walls are murals filled with fairy tale characters that correspond to the theme of the room. The museum’s website fact sheet also highlights three Egyptian figures of the goddess Isis that date to over 4,000 years old. The doll house became her own “cabinet of wonders” into which she deposited her wealth and gave over the power of the world to an alternate universe of fantasy on display.

**Portrait Study Two: The Collection of Faith Bradford**

Faith Bradford was a lifelong miniature collector. She was born in New York. Her family moved to the Washington, D.C area when she was one year old. She was raised and lived in the Washington suburb of Chevy Chase, Maryland (Bird 2010: 11, 26). She graduated from Mount Vernon Seminary (now College), in 1900 and received her first job at the D.C. Public Library in 1903. She was not in her first position very long, though, before she resigned, citing health problems. Five years later she returned to work but this time at the Library of Congress (Bird 2010: 28). By 1942, she had risen to become the head of the card catalog division at the Library of Congress, the first woman to ever head a division at the Library (Bird 2010; Edwards 2010).
Beginning in 1887, when Bradford was about seven years old, her passion for collecting miniatures was born when her older sister gave her a four-room doll house which included some miniatures. Sadly, only one of those original pieces exists today (Klapthor 1977). As a young adult when she went out with her brother and his friends, she would wander toy shops in D.C. searching for the perfect premade pieces or things she could convert into miniature objects. Later, when Bradford’s collection of miniatures outgrew her old, four-room doll house, she displayed them on a bookshelf in her room (Not being married meant she never owned a home, so her room was her only display space.) By the early 1930s, in retirement from the Library of Congress, her collection commanded so much interest that she made it accessible to the public for donations which she gave to various charity events. One such event was held at a tavern in Alexandria; another at a downtown department store (Bird 2010: 30-32).

By the late 1940s, without children or female heirs, Bradford made an offer to donate her collection to the Smithsonian Museum still located in the Arts & Industry (A&I) building. Her reasoning was that the museum she visited frequently as a child and loved so much, should have a doll house (Bird 2010). The museum accepted Bradford's offer as an "endowment by display", which was at the time a popular collection method. This practice ended shortly after the acquisition of the Bradford collection but still, the display helped the first national museum in the Nation's capital curate a nostalgic collection with items of significant social and historical meaning (Bird 2010: 24). The first curator of the Bradford collection was Margaret Brown (Klapthor 1977:), at that time, the youngest member of the staff, fresh out of college and the only woman available
for the job (Bird 2010: 11). Brown had been tasked with the First Ladies' gown collection and then, later, the Bradford doll house. These were two collections in which the majority of the department (men) had absolutely no interest. Brown, however, saw the potential for the miniatures that "idealized the domestic life of “an American family," one that could help in her mission to modernize the museum (Bird 2010: 40). Both the First Ladies’ collection and the Doll House became and remain some of the most popular exhibits now located in the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

**Portrait Study Three: The Collection of Flora Gill Jacobs**

Flora Gill Jacobs, from Chevy Chase Maryland, was known as the "country's foremost authority on antique doll houses and their furniture" (Lamb 2006). While Jacobs always had a fascination for miniatures, she was a writer before she began seriously collecting. She went to George Washington University for a few years before quitting when she received a job offer to work for the “Women's Page” section of The Washington Post newspaper. By 1942, when Jacobs was only twenty-three, she was promoted to the position of editor of the women’s section of the paper and again later to one of only three “general reporters” at the Post (Lamb 2006). In 1945, Jacobs bought her first doll house and renovated it while researching her first book. While still at the Post, she began writing about her real passion and published her first book, *A History of Dolls' Houses* (1953). This work was followed by several other publications, including children's novels based on or about doll houses.
Jacobs’ collection continued to grow. Because of the number of doll houses she owned and her desire to share them by hosting people in her family home, keeping her doll house collection at home became unsustainable. In 1975, Jacobs rented a property behind Washington’s trendy Lord and Taylor’s department store, at 523 44th Street, N.W., and opened her very own doll house museum. The admission price was $3.00 for adults, and $1.00 for children under three (Lamb 2006). By all accounts, her museum was said to bring in 20,000 visitors a year (Lamb 2006; N.Y.T. 1985; Fox 2006). A special New York Times article from 1985 described the museum as having five rooms full of antique houses and a museum shop designed to inspire both adults and children to buy and take home miniatures for their own collections. The Museum also boasted a birthday tea room with an Edwardian waitress in period costume (“Among the Dolls and Toys”, N.Y.T. sec.1985).

Jacobs was both the founder and president of her museum. She worked there six days a week until 2004, when she closed her museum’s doors. The doll houses kept at the museum went to auction, but not all of her houses were sold, as she still had more at home. Because of her reputation in the world of miniatures, and perhaps also the notable doll houses she acquired, her collection ended up being sold for a total of $1.4 million (Fox 2006). Not bad for a “hobby”.
Portrait Study Four: The Collection of Frances Glessner Lee

Frances Glessner Lee is best known for her contributions to the field of forensic sciences. As an upper-class, Victorian woman, Lee was not able to work or pursue activities alone outside the home. Her family lived in Chicago, Illinois, in a mansion built by a prominent architect. Lee and her brother were both home-schooled, as was then the custom for the progeny of the wealthy. At age 19, Lee married while her brother was studying at Harvard. After an unhappy marriage, she was divorced from her husband. The divorce caused a strain between Lee and her family who frowned upon the decision. However, since Lee was denied a college education and employment, she was financially dependent on her father and unable to escape her family’s disappointment. Eventually, Lee became the only surviving heir to her family fortune⁶, and was then able to make decisions for herself and begin to live her life. As a child, she was always fascinated by mysteries, especially Sir Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes’ detective crime novels. Knowing this, George Burgess Magrath who was an old Harvard classmate of her brother began to expose Lee to the advances being made in medical sciences which could be used to bring criminals to justice (Miller 2005). This field we now know as forensics.

In 1931, Lee donated a portion of her wealth to her brother’s alma mater and, as a result, Harvard built a library and opened a department of legal medicine, the first of its kind in the United States. This, in turn, provided George Burgess Magrath a legal chair in

⁶ Lee’s brother passed away in 1929 from appendicitis and pneumonia. Both her parents died within six years of her brother’s death. Lee lived to be 83. The Glessner family home has been preserved and declared a historic landmark. For more information see The Glessner House Museum, https://www.glessnerhouse.org/the-house/.
medicine in which he gave seminars on various homicide investigations which had remained unsolved. Lee attended these seminars, and she was the only women in a room full of men. As if that did not garner her program enough attention, she would afterwards host all the seminar participants at a privately catered banquet at the Ritz Carleton (Miller 2005).

Between the 1930s and 1940s, Lee began her project that led to lasting contributions to the field of forensics. By using miniatures in the traditional, 1 inch to 1-foot scale, Lee constructed dioramas based on real crimes. From her own imagination, she devised a plausible plot for the crime. The interior room or rooms of the diorama and the characters she also imagined being involved, became the crime scene. The crimes were deaths of women, the elderly and the working class, which were often overlooked in society. In her passionate search for justice, Lee wanted to highlight the unconscious biases of the predominantly white, male police force and allow them to confront their biases in a simulation exercise. By 1945, she had completed twenty "nutshell murder" scenes. Only eighteen of those dioramas have survived through the years. Harvard accepted the gift of these dioramas and they were incorporated into teaching seminars. After the program lost funding and the department closed, the “nutshell murders” and their dioramas were moved to the Maryland County coroner's office where they have been used to this day for training. The three-dimensional aspect of the models affords the observer the ability to walk around the object and see things from every possible angle. Despite technological advances, this system has yet to be replicated anywhere else. Lee
was awarded an honorary title as a Captain of the New Hampshire Police Department, becoming the first female to achieve this position (Miller 2005).

Her collection finally became a public museum display in 2017 at the Renwick Gallery in Washington D.C. Despite her contributions and achievements, Lee was still described by the curator, in 2017 as being well respected, but she could not resist the temptation to also describe her as a “grandma” with “murder as her hobby” (Zhang 2017).

Conclusion

Do these women seem to be “going nowhere” with their miniature collections as the category of hobby would imply? Would it be proper to categorize their miniature scaled worlds as “just a hobby”? These doll houses and miniatures were not just objects inside the home, kept as a purely selfish leisure activity. As has been shown, all of the women’s collections have been on public display. All the styles look slightly different. All of the women were inspired in different ways to pursue their passion of collecting miniatures. What these women collectors found most appealing, it seems, was the process of collecting and arranging itself and the freedom and power this activity afforded them. They all dedicated massive amounts of time, energy, and resources to these mini fantasy worlds. However, only Lee’s “nutshell murders” displayed the uncomfortable truth over beauty-- that the home can also be a dangerous place.
From my analysis, it appears that these women devoted a good part of their lives to these projects. Although the collections are not traditional, they are not classified in the same way as other women's crafts or art forms are in art museums. These women were skilled collectors, and their crafts and collecting techniques appear to be better placed classified with artifacts of science, technology, and history. Their doll houses very much symbolize women's place in society, which, up until the mid-twentieth-century, was confined to the home. In this way, the doll houses symbolically captures a liminal space in which the collector engages in a process that at one and the same time is distinct from life-size reality of objects and yet also reproduces the constructs of their society and gender realistically (Turner 1967: 93-94).

Almost all of the women profiled here had occupations outside the home. Moore, Bradford, Jacobs, and Lee all seemed to be subverting the traditional domestic roles that were prescribed to them by society. Yet, ironically their miniatures were in a sense recreating and reinforcing the idea of these domestic roles. The one exception was Lee whose murder scenes mainly dealt with the marginalized in society women, the elderly and the poor, with the hope that her dioramas would finally make them visible to the law, which would then grant them justice.

For anyone to categorize both making and collecting miniatures as simply a “hobby,” especially in these four collectors would negate the collectors’ talent for astute social and historical observations. All of these doll house collectors lived through decades of slow reform with respect to women's rights and the first waves of feminism. Feminism is an idea that all people should be treated equally, but as studies have shown,
the first wave of feminism largely excluded women of color, the economically impoverished, and people with disabilities. The civil rights movement ended up benefiting upper to middle-class women who slowly forgot or never acknowledged the earlier movements that made their accomplishments possible. In general, almost all notable collectors of early American doll houses are white women with some level of education and powerful social networks. They all had a roof over their heads as they grew up and never had to experience housing insecurity or, worse yet, the trauma of being deported and displaced from the only home they have ever known. These white women’s lives may not have been ideal and their collections ironically gave them a chance to move far outside their domestic spheres-- but they were afforded the right to live in the “ideal homes” constructed across America.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

For over 450 years, women, most of whom are white, have been reproducing miniature domestic interior spaces. Attention to detail and layout of every object found in a period home is one of the many reasons that doll houses are found in museum collections. The doll house was invented as a plaything for the amusement of adults in the sixteenth century. The Dutch were particularly interested in the authentic reproductions and status symbols of their private miniature houses. The didactic purpose of the display was for women to see and model good domestic behavior. Doll houses have nearly always been used as a visual tool allowing for the communication of ideas to be displayed and staged as a model, an example of proper housekeeping and good behavior for women in the house. The children’s doll house of the nineteenth century became a simple version to allow for more of the child’s imagination to grow.

This research has focused primarily on the four doll house collectors, their collections, and the written work they produced. The housing model floor plans of two popular mail-order companies were also examined (See Appendix) along with examples of ladies domestic advice literature. The objective was to identify how the cultural artifact of the early twentieth century doll house informs a deeper understanding of American culture and also serves as a symbolic representation of the iconic American home.
Dollhouses up until the early twentieth century are stereotypical archetypes of an interior space and do not challenge conventional ideas.

The doll house offers a window into historical spaces and objects within homes that are now long gone. A preliminary question this thesis attempted to answer is this: Do Doll Houses project an image of what should be in a house, or do they reflect actual homes in existence? It seems that in the act of creating these doll houses as imaginative playthings, collectors and manufacturers actually helped define and normalize an archetype of what they imagined as the ideal home. For most of the period under review in this thesis, that was classified as a colonial model two-story, single family structure with a triangular sloped roof. By the early twentieth century pages of mail order housing catalogs idealized the image of the “middle class” American home to the general public. This archetypical ideal home was already in existence and was replicated all across the country, but the perfect doll house, especially in a museum space, helped construct the perfect pedagogical tool to reinforce the archetype as well as reinforce the ideology of domesticity and strengthen gender norms.

Doll houses display historical interiors but they are not just symbols of material culture. The early twentieth century doll house also displayed dominant gender norms, class and racial differences and a domestic service economy that was declining by the middle of the twentieth century. After applying a socio-political analysis of the doll house the ideal home came to be in the U.S. The doll house ideal was constructed as a white family, living in a white middle class
neighborhood. This is the hegemonic narrative of the doll house that reflects symbolic meanings of gender roles, as well as race and class divisions.

All four portraits of the collectors were white, upper middle-class women. Yet, their lives did not resemble what their doll houses depicted. Did these women contest societies menial place for them in the home? Moore, Bradford, Jacobs, and Lee were all literate, well-educated, well-connected, and capable women who were more than housewives. These collectors did not resemble the ideal doll house inhabitants, in many ways they contradicted the ideal they reproduced. For example, Bradford was never married or owned a home, Moore and Bradford never had children, and Lee and Moore divorced their husbands. While it appears that in constructing their doll houses these women were allowed an uncontested place to live out the ideal hegemonic narrative for women, regardless of whether their real life experience was to the contrary. These four collectors, perhaps due to their status in society, were all able to communicate their knowledge of Victorian ideologies for women; while at the same time, not always having to adhere to those ideologies in their own life. In a sense, the attention of doll houses has always been on the presentation of an ideal regardless of reality. The four collectors doll houses biography acquired a social life through the interactions with Moore, Bradford, Jacobs and Lee as well as the social networks they were a part of that eventually led to their collections being placed on display at major museums across the U.S.
Further research and new perspectives on the history of the American home as a deeply political space could further engage in more intersectional discourse about American cultural history. The doll house is projected and represented as the ideal home based on dominate Protestant cultural views. Not for a lack of effort, this research simply could not find miniature homes before the early twentieth century, made by or representing people of color, the disabled or ethnically diverse inhabitants. If the doll house can teach us anything about the process and construction of the ideal, it is that a paracosm is open to interpretation. In the future, museums and doll houses should not be bound to conventional archetypes, but instead be encouraged to break from the norm and allow for difference to flourish.
APPENDIX: FLOOR PLANS

A. Floor Plan of the Berber House, Bourdieu (1970: 166)

B. The Jefferson model No. 3349 from Sears, Roebuck and Co. mail order catalog reprinted (2003: 29) illustrates the rear service entrance in the kitchen, and the two-story American colonial architecture popularized during this period.
DESIGNED along the same lines as historic Mt. Vernon, this southern colonial home spells success. Many types of colonial architecture have "stood up" for years with American home builders. Among these types the southern colonial has held its share of popularity and today is classed as one of the greatest types. Exterior walls of whitewashed brick form a pleasing background for the dark green shutters and roof.

LIVING ROOM AND SUN ROOM, dining room and kitchen open off the center hall on the first floor. Note many convenient closets for outer wraps. Second floor plan contains hall, four large bedrooms and two baths. This roomy home boasts a total of ten closets.

Fill our Information Blank and we will send you complete delivered price, photographic architectural elevations and floor plans, also outline of specifications.

C. Modern Home No. 212 and No. 125 from Sears, Roebuck and Co. mail order catalog from 1913 reprinted (2006: 106) both illustrate the rear
service entrance in the kitchen found also in both single family homes with either one or two floors.
D. The Aladdin Company 1917 catalog (1995: 30) provided many examples of kitchens in the rear of the house. Here is also an example of American colonial architecture seen here in “The Colonial” model.
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