

Pushing the Needle:
Collections Based Museum and Source Community Collaborations

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Abstract

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The purpose of this research was to describe the ways object based collaborations with source communities are shifting and influencing museum collections practices and the role of the museum professional. This qualitative study examined six interviews with museum professionals who work directly with objects and source communities at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture and the National Museum of American Indian. Themes arose which emphasized the necessity of reciprocity and true collaboration, shifts in the authority to make decisions, and the prioritization of relationships over museum agendas. Research suggested the ethic of source community primacy is often brought to this collaborative work, not inspired by it. These projects are idiosyncratic. Each object has its own cultural context and protocols for care and treatment. Through listening, building reciprocal relationships, and not resting on assumptions we can move forward in respectful collaboration and begin to decolonize.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“During our second week we were confronted with two boxes, each holding a mixture of kayak and harpoon parts. Paul and Wassilie carefully separated them, gave each a name, and described their use, placing kayak parts in one box and harpoon parts in another. When I looked the next day, the museum’s collection manager had reordered the ivories according to the original confusion, since that was the way they had historically been located in storage” (Fienup-Riordan, 2003, p. 32).

“Clearly, many old conventions in museum collection management, lexicon, and conservation have lost their purpose. If the field of museology is truly egalitarian and moving forward then there must be centrifugal answers to our problems. We will labor, co-labor, *collaborate* from the fixed center. We are aware knowledges are transitory and fluid and the old systems supporting only one way of knowing are themselves artifacts of humanity’s misstep” (Enote, 2015, p. 1).

Old habits die hard. We are inculcated into a culture, a way of doing things, and as museum professionals working with collections we are taught ‘best practices’. The conventional rules for the care, storage, cataloging, and research of objects reflect a Western colonial system. Caring for ethnographic and archaeological objects and archival materials in state or national repositories raises a number of ethical questions. Who owns them and the knowledge imbued in them? Who has the authority to determine methods of care, conservation, and storage? Is it the ‘trained museum professional’ or the community to whom the cultural knowledge belongs? Jim Enote, the director of the A:shiwi A:wana Museum and Heritage Center presents in his Museum Collaboration Manifesto the idea that,

“we continue to see items in collections disguised with mistaken and unsuitable interpretations. With so much error many items gain false significance and meaning by the hand of outdated standards and practice. It is strange enough that things are removed from their local setting and context, now they have been renamed and reframed in languages and contexts foreign to the place and people from which they were born” (2015, p.1).

Objects mean nothing without context, without the people and histories behind them. Museum scholars talk and write about the need to decolonize (Boast, 2011; Lonetree, 2012), but is this

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ethic seeping into the structural fabric of non-tribal institutions? Is working with source communities to put objects back into context shifting the role of the museum professional?

Stephen Weil argued that the museum model which emerged in the 1990's, "through its public service orientation, use[s] its very special competencies in dealing with objects to contribute positively to the quality of individual human lives and to enhance the well-being of human communities" (Weil, 1999, 171). It is through this relationship with objects that museums have historically found their greatest successes and failures. Behind each object housed in museum collections is a community of makers, users, and their descendants, otherwise known as the object's 'source community'. A source community, also termed descendent community, is defined in the literature as the group from whom museum objects were collected, often as a result of colonial systems (Ashmore, 2015; Peers & Brown, 2003; Turner, 2015). While the term often refers to Indigenous peoples, this can apply to any cultural group from whom museums have collected objects including groups local to the museum, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, and settlers (Peers & Brown, 2003). Amy Lonetree, a Native museum scholar, puts forth the question, "how can we begin to decolonize a very Western institution that has been so intimately linked to the colonization process?". She argues that this would require museums to assist communities in addressing the legacies of historical unresolved grief (2003). Nancy Mithlo in her discussion on the politics of inclusion of Native communities argues that the presence of Native bodies or objects does not imply the adoption of Native knowledge systems. Nor should museum professionals assume collection and preservation are necessary and the norm (2004). She argues for the deconstruction of the binary paradigms of Western vs. Native systems of thought and the creation of a third, more blurred space. Could the way museums use and care for objects become this blurred space? More and more museums are

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collaborating with source communities on a variety of projects. This takes many forms, such as community curated exhibits, research projects, the revitalization of maker practices, or using objects for collective healing. Culturally sensitive object care methodologies are beginning to work their way into standards of care (Buck & Allman, 2010; Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Sadongei, 2004; Thomas, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways that collections based collaborations with source communities are influencing and shifting museum collections practices and the role of the museum professional. It is the intention that this study will add to the body of collections literature and continue the conversation about the shifting roles of museum professionals as we move through neocolonialism and this period of open collaboration. The process of decolonization is by its very nature unsettling (Tuck & Yang, 2012). By highlighting the experiences of those who are challenging these structures and building lasting, reciprocal relationships with their communities, I hope to push the field to be more inclusive not just of bodies within the museum space, but of ideologies and practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study sits at the intersection of several discussions taking place within the museological community. It fits within the larger context of general trends of new museology but is rooted in both the theory and praxis associated with the act of decolonization. This research is intended to add to the growing body of literature addressing collaborative projects that connect source communities with objects and materials housed in museum collections. To begin with a definition, the term ‘source community’ (also called originating communities or descendent communities) refers to those from whom museum objects were collected, both in the past and their modern descendants (Ashmore, 2015; Peers & Brown, 2003). While the term often refers to Indigenous peoples, this can apply to any cultural group from whom museums have collected objects including groups local to the museum, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, and settlers (Peers & Brown, 2003). This work also rests on the notion that objects play a vital role in the transmission of culture (Leibrick, 1989). Due to their tangible nature, objects exist in time and space independently of people (Kreps, 2003). But yet, they are intimately tied to their communities. Through these seemingly oppositional qualities they are able to bridge generations, bringing continuity and connectedness (Leibrick, 1989). In her 1989 article, “The Power of Objects”, Liebrick sees material culture as, apart from language, culture’s principal medium of communication. In the temporary absence of people, objects are culture’s only means for information storage. Liebrick acknowledges that, “a single simple object can communicate vastly complex feelings and bundles of information. It can also simultaneously evoke differing, even conflicting types and levels of information, depending on who is viewing it and in what context” (1989, p. 203). This makes interpretation of material culture outside of its cultural context a problematic endeavor.

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Museum Community Engagement

As museums presumably move “from being about something to being for somebody” (Weil, 1999) discussions have arisen which challenge museums to become inclusive spaces (Newman, McLean, & Urquhart, 2005; Coffee, 2008; Mithlo, 2004, Sandell; 1998) which engage and collaborate more deeply with their communities (Crooke, 2011; Golding & Modest, 2011; Ashmore, 2015; Swan & Jordan, 2015). Emlyn Koster argued that museums must undergo a ‘transformation of consciousness’ toward socially responsible agendas, lest they lose their relevance to the point where they are no longer sustainable (2006). Stephen Weil famously asserted that the emerging museum model should, “through its public service orientation, use its very special competencies in dealing with objects to contribute positively to the quality of individual human lives and to enhance the well-being of human communities” (Weil, 1999, 171).

Issues surrounding access to collections arise throughout community engagement literature. Many museums now grant access through the digitization of collections, making photos and catalog records available online (Duke, 2014; Bertacchini, 2013; Wickell, 2014). For some institutions collections access has been successfully facilitated through open storage (Stanbury, 2010), though this is an area which is woefully under researched. While it is acknowledged that open storage has been implemented (Allen, 2001; Orcutt, 2011) there is little research or evaluation to support or negate the practice. Neither of these phenomena, online access or open storage, facilitate one-on-one, or hands on interactions with collections. Some institutions, like the Nottingham Loans Collection, have sets of artifacts which are set aside for the sole purpose of being handled as a part of educational programming and community outreach projects (Trewinnard-Boyle & Tabassi, 2007). In this case the communities surveyed were not the source communities of those objects. Several studies have addressed the power of object

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handling and their use in geriatric care. In these cases, spending time with museum objects had therapeutic affects (Jacques, 2011; Thomson & Chatterjee, 2016). Thomson and Chatterjee's study showed that the elderly patients at a London hospital who participated in a program which allowed them to handle and discuss a variety of museum objects displayed enhanced confidence, social interaction and learning (2016). Jacques' study, which connected elderly respondents with objects specifically chosen to represent an aspect of their personal history and create feelings of nostalgia also showed therapeutic affects (2011).

The community centered museum which Weil saw as an emerging trend in the 1990's is now so deeply entrenched in the current dialogue surrounding museum practice that words like 'community' and 'inclusive' have been labeled as buzzwords (Crooke, 2011). Language such as 'engagement models' has even been deemed 'musevom', a term coined during a talk at the 2016 Museum Australasia conference which refers to jargon used so frequently by the museum community that they "make you vomit" (Fishwick & Boleyn, 2016). Crooke argues that the word "community" seems to have replaced "audience" or "public" within museum literature (2011, 170). Others criticize community engagement practices in general for relying on a reductive, utopic definition of the word 'community' and failing to account for the dynamism and complexity of actual communities (Joseph, 2002). The definition of 'community' can be viewed more fluidly; as a concept in a constant state of renegotiation, ever changing, shifting, and deciding what is and is not a 'community' (Onicul, 2013). As Crooke points out, defining the word 'community' may be less useful than understanding the ways in which the term is used (2011).

Engagement can be characterized using Arnstein's *Ladder of Participation* (1969) which ranks different forms of engagement/participation. These are divided into three categories, non-

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participation, tokenism, and citizen power as the prime level of engagement at the top of the ladder where the community's experience and voice is valued above the institution. This ladder orients engagement around power structures, and who in the relationship holds power. Arnstein argues for pushing past consultations and into citizen control which requires a shift in the power to make decisions. When placed within a museological context, this framework can be used to critique the community engagement models utilized by museums and assess if they are addressing the inherent power structures within the institution.

Decolonizing the Museum

Museums are inherently colonial spaces. Historically museums have acted as the “premier colonial institution” (Boast, 2011, p. 64) which collected, categorized, objectified, and reduced the colonized for the gaze and pleasure of white Western collectors and visitors (Bennet, 1995; Boast, 2011; Harrison, 1997; Smith 1999). Pervasive structures of discrimination continue to exist within deeply entrenched museum practices which dictate the way collections are documented and organized. For many institutions these practices have remained unchanged from their eighteenth and nineteenth century origins (Krpmotich & Peers, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Turner, 2015). Because of this undeniable history, and continued perpetuation of colonial systems, museums can be painful sites for colonized peoples. There has been an increased demand from Indigenous and other colonized communities for a greater voice in how their cultures are being represented and preserved. This has challenged museums to confront their colonial history and redefine policies and strategies which effect people and their cultural heritage (Kreps, 2003). While this study does not solely focus on collaborations with Native American and First Nations communities, much of the work around decolonizing museums in

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North America does come from Indigenous scholars. Much of the literature discussed here sits firmly in a Native American or First Nations context.

Tuck and Yang in their piece for the inaugural issue of *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* argue that decolonization is a distinct mission separate from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects (2012). They note that within education and social science discourse the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted and used to reconcile settler guilt and complicity and to ensure a settler future.

“When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.3).

Decolonization in this context is something specific and intentional. From this perspective, it is not possible to decolonize the museum space without a complete overhaul of what a museum is and has historically been, the decolonized museum cannot be grafted into the existing museum framework. It is an inherently difficult and unsettling process.

A concept to be addressed when discussing the process of decolonization is the idea of the “inclusive museum”. Some place the museum's capacity for inclusion within the framework of representation of cultures which could affirm community identity and promote tolerance (Sandell, 1998). Inclusivity in some contexts has been expanded to address the specific practices of the museum institution, not only the demographics who feel welcomed inside their doors. This can include collection guidelines, how objects are interpreted, how the museum addresses, or

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does not address, underserved communities, or universal design (Coffee, 2008). Coffee also points out that it is problematic to address the issue of inclusion without acknowledging the social hierarchy and power structures which shape a museum's inherent accessibility. Ruth Phillips argues that the categories which structure the museum system are a "residue of obsolete nineteenth-century ideologies" which continue to create domains of inclusion and exclusion and perpetuate "colonial attitudes about race, patriarchal ideas about gender, and elitist notions about class" and until they are changed they will undermine any new approaches to museum representation (2011, p. 95). This issue extends beyond physical inclusion to embrace the inclusion of knowledge systems. Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, argues that the collective memory of imperialism is perpetuated through the, "ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (1999, p. 1-2). Smith describes imperialism as not only national economic expansion and the subjugation of the Other, but as a "discursive field of knowledge" (1999, p.21). Kreps asserts that until recently museology has relied almost exclusively on this Western knowledge system to dictate custodial and curatorial practices. She advocates for a reimagining of museological discourse to include multiple voices and perspectives, asserting that, "museological behavior is a cross-cultural phenomenon" (2003, p.16). Nancy Mithlo in her discussion on the politics of inclusion of Native communities argues that the presence of Native bodies or objects does not imply the adoption of Native knowledge systems. She argues for the deconstruction of the binary paradigms of Western vs. Native systems of thought and the creation of a third, blurred space (2004).

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This idea of the museum as a blurred space originated from James Clifford's idea of museums as 'contact zones' which facilitate inter- and cross-cultural relationships and grant space for challenging conversations (1997). This concept can be taken a step further to promote museums as "engagement zones" which, while imperfect, hold the potential to gradually change societal power structures. This ultimately benefits both museums and communities by improving current cross-cultural relations and increasing validity in cultural representations (Onicul, 2013). Laura Peers and Alison Brown in their work on museums and source communities saw objects themselves as contact zones, as "sources of knowledge and as catalysts for new relationships—both within and between these communities" (2003, p. 4). Robin Boast revisits the idea of the museum as a contact zone and argues that these interactions between museums and source communities are inherently one-sided with collaborations that last only a short period of time. He asserts that no matter how welcoming or accommodating the museum makes itself, it is still a space where, "the Others come to perform for us, not with us" (2011, p.63). The dialogue that happens is an opportunity for source community members to add their voices to the objects. In his view it is only this "accumulation" of knowledge that is significant for the museum, the object, and the public (2011, p.66). Without creating lasting, reciprocal relationships museums will continue to stand as pillars of imperial power.

The need for reciprocity is echoed throughout decolonization literature (Boast, 2011; Haakanson, 2004; Hoerig, 2010; Lonetree, 2012; Mithlo, 2004; Nordstrand, 2004; Peers & Brown, 2003) and general community engagement literature alike (Swan & Jordan, 2015; Smith, 2015). Museums have been criticized for utilizing source community members to increase knowledge about collections and deepen the interpretive value of exhibits without reciprocity to the community (Boast, 2011; Harrison, 1997; Hoerig, 2010; Lonetree, 2012; Mitho, 2004).

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Mithlo argues that in many cases increasing indigenous participation in the museum process places a burden on Native community members and often fails to connect the real research needs of tribal organizations with museum activities, perpetuating an imbalance of power (2004). Karl Hoerig pushes museums to move beyond the consultation model and create exhibits that are not just *about* indigenous communities but also *for* them. Through these relationships, both the community and the museum benefit from increasing their audiences and the spread of their knowledge (2011). Peers and Brown see this as an evolving relationship in which both parties share skills, knowledge, and power to produce an outcome which is valuable to all those involved (2003). Sven Haakanson sees long-lasting relationships with museums as a way for Native communities to connect with their material culture, understand past traditions, and demonstrate links to their prehistory and heritage (2004). Peers and Brown assert that one of the most important elements for museums working with source communities is that, “trust-building is considered integral to the process, and creating respect or healing the effects of the past is seen as being as important as co-writing labels or enhancing the database” (2003, p. 9).

Amy Lonetree argues that for museums to serve as sites for decolonization they must honor Indigenous knowledge and worldviews and challenge stereotypical representations of Native people. They must serve as sites of “knowledge making and remembering” for their communities and the public, and not shy away from exhibiting the harsh realities of colonialism in order to promote healing and understanding (2012, p.25). She asserts that museums must assist Native communities in addressing the legacies of “historical unresolved grief” (2012, p. 5). The process of reconnecting with material culture, with ancestors, and with one’s heritage has been shown to promote healing after historical trauma (Peers, 2013) and social loss (Miller & Parrot, 2009). Laura Peers addresses the idea of historical trauma in their description of a

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program which reconnected the Blackfoot community with five historic Blackfoot shirts housed at the Pitt Rivers Museum in England. Through their physical connection with these shirts, the community addressed historical traumas and engaged in what she described as “ceremonies of renewal” (2016, p. 1). The book, *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts*, edited by Elizabeth Pye begins to explore some of the ways that intimate connections with objects can influence museum practice (2007).

The discussion of museum decolonization often centers around the representation of cultures and shifting curatorial voice and authority away from the institutions to source communities through exhibit design and interpretation. (Lonetree, 2012; Modest, 2013; Mithlo, 2004; Onicul, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Sleeper-Smith; 2009). Lonetree asserts that it is “now commonplace and expected that museum professionals will seek the input of contemporary communities when developing exhibitions focusing on American Indian content” (2012, p. 1). Susan Sleeper-Smith argues that Indigenous people are, “using museums to emerge from invisibility and to deconstruct the colonization narrative from the viewpoint of the oppressed” (2009, p. 4). Mithlo argues that museums continue to self-perpetuate and maintain their authority despite their efforts to “give voice” to others (Mithlo, 2004). Onicul notes that currently engagement with communities in exhibit design is, “limited by the context in which it occurs and the extent to which a museum is willing to take on, adapt, and indigenize its practice, products, and ethos” (2013, p. 94). The literature surrounding the politics of cultural representation and attempts to shift curatorial voice is vast, but as this study is rooted in the care and stewardship of objects less time will be spent exploring this work.

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Traditional Object Care

In Western museum culture the care of objects and archival materials is rooted in the idea that all objects and archival materials are to be preserved and held in trust for the public in perpetuity. If Indigenous or non-Western perspectives are to be included in museums then they should not assume that collecting and preserving are the norm (Mithlo, 2004). Cristina Kreps counters this by citing a number of examples which show collection and curatorial practices in many non-western cultures. She notes that the argument that non-western people are not concerned with preservation has been used to justify the collection and retention of cultural property in western museums. She suggests that if the role of ‘curator’ can also be thought of as a ‘caretaker’ or ‘keeper’, then in many societies priests, shamans, spiritual leaders, and royal functionaries fulfill the role of curator. Kreps argues for cross-culturally oriented approaches to the management and care of collections as steps toward, “the liberation of culture from the hegemony of the management regimes of Eurocentric museology” (2003, p. 4-5). Jim Enote, the director of the A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center argues that many conventions of museum collections management, lexicon, and conservation have lost their purpose and if the field is to move toward an egalitarian future then museums must acknowledge multiple systems of knowing and collaborate with source communities (2015). Some non-tribal museums in the U.S. have begun to incorporate other ways of knowing, or what is often termed ‘traditional care’ methodologies into collections care procedures (Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Thomas, 2004). Some attribute this to the 1990 passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which required museums to consult with tribal members to return human remains, funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony which had been taken from Native communities and housed in repositories for many years (Kreps, 2003;

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Haakanson, 2004; Sadongei, 2004). The incorporation of cultural considerations into the care and handling of objects begins to place them back into the cultural context from which they are inherently displaced when in museum storage (Sadongei, 2004). Kirshenblatt-Gimlett comments on this displacement saying, “ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Such objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers” (1991, p. 387). Joan Celeste Thomas argues that the act of recontextualizing objects through curatorial practices enriches museum professionals both in their career and as a person (2004). Amy Lonetree suggests that every engagement with museum objects begin with the recognition that objects are living entities with layers of meaning that are inextricably tied to their descendent communities (2012).

Much of the literature which discusses incorporating traditional care methods, or other ways of knowing, into museum practice focuses on what are termed ‘culturally sensitive’ objects. These may be objects of cultural patrimony, sacred, ceremonial, or religious objects, human remains, funerary objects, or objects that are highly charged due to their historical relevance (Edwards, 2010; Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001). When working with objects of this nature Joan Celeste Thomas urges museums and collectors to be aware that, “no object exists within a cultural vacuum. There are people who care deeply about how you are handling, displaying, and storing the cultural material in your care” (2004, p. 10). Communities may have unique protocols for handling and storage, and preferences may differ within that community. Some museums require that the individual requesting changes to the way objects are being handled or stored have “legitimate authority” within the community (Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001). For Flynn and Hull-Walski “legitimate authority” lies with official tribal or national representatives, religious leaders, and “qualified researchers” including internal departmental

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staff (2001). There have been instances where authorities within the community disagree over care procedures, as is the case in Reedy's description of a conservation project of Tibetan sculptures (1992). Some of the Tibetan Buddhist teachers consulted believed that it was always inappropriate for non-initiated scholars to study images of Buddhist deities while others were accepting under certain circumstances (Reedy, 1992). Flynn and Hull-Walski argue for a need to defer changes in storage methodologies until a consensus is reached (2001).

Due to the individual nature of community's relationships with objects, culturally sensitive care takes many forms. Alyce Sadongei asserts that the special care of sacred objects cannot be reduced to a list of static guidelines, as the very notion of sacredness is not static. She also argues that tribal museums are in the best position to care for sacred and significant objects as they are a space where tribal protocols can dictate museum practice (2004). Other scholars have noted the benefits of tribal and non-Western museums presenting and caring for their own cultural materials (Kreps, 2003; Lonetree, 2012). This has not been ignored within this study. As both of the sites included in this study are Western, non-tribal institutions the following will focus on the ways that non-tribal institutions have incorporated traditional care into their custodial practices.

In the article "Merging Traditional Indigenous Curation Methods with Modern Museum Standards of Care" (2001), Flynn and Hull-Walski review the culturally sensitive care policies and procedures that have been implemented within the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. The authors recommend that institutions develop procedures to implement standards of care in a consistent manner. They have developed a set of guidelines which allow a number of changes to practices including rehousing objects, creating specialized mounts, new locations, changes in orientation, and identifying

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objects by the correct cultural group—particularly those who may have reclaimed their original names which were changed by colonial governments. They discuss a number of requests for changes to orientation, location, and storage methods. For example, some fetishes must be stored upright out of respect so special mounts were made to prevent toppling or someone inadvertently laying on their sides after handling. Hopi Katsina masks are living, breathing entities and cannot be stored under plastic or in airtight containers. The museum was considering the option of using screened vents to house living objects.

Flynn and Hull-Walski also describe some of the challenges that arose particularly around restricting access. Their position as a public institution which receives federal funding means that they cannot discriminate against or support any particular religious view. Their way of handling this was to label the storage units containing objects which communities wished to restrict access to as such and “allowing those who wish to obey the restriction the opportunity to do so” (2001, p. 35). Some communities wish to leave offerings or ceremonially feed sacred objects which often requires bringing plant material into the collections storage. This can harbor or attract pests. The museum has developed several options to mitigate risk including sealing the offerings in plastic bags or boxes and pest strips are placed nearby and monitored regularly. Another challenge is presented by the size and scope of the collections. With collections from all over the world creating standardized policy which reflects the diversity of cultural and spiritual beliefs is virtually impossible. Hull and Walski remind the readers that, “while all objects should be treated with care and respect, it is also necessary to remember that not all cultures view their sacred, ceremonial, or culturally sensitive material in the same way” (2001, p. 31).

Kreps discusses procedures developed at the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology for the handling of human remains, unassociated funerary objects, items of

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cultural patrimony, and sacred objects which have been separated from the general collections and stored in a separate NAGPRA vault (2003). Access to these spaces are restricted to museum staff and tribal representatives for tribal visits or maintenance. Women are unable to enter the room or handle some NAGPRA related objects during menstruation or in some instances, pregnancy. Many of the items, including human remains, are not stored in plastic, allowing them to breath. Tribal representatives are permitted to feed or make offerings, though some food items are restricted due to pests. Smudging, a process of burning offerings such as sage, tobacco, or sweet grass, to create smoke which washes the objects, is allowed but advance notice must be given to the facility staff to avoid fire alarms. Research is also restricted for these objects. The museum sent a survey to 209 tribes to assess concerns or suggestions tribes might have in preparation for a move to a new facility. Of the twenty-nine tribes that responded, the majority did not object to the museum staff determining the packing methods and materials used. The majority of respondents emphasized that they did not want human remains and their associated funerary objects separated during transport. Invitations were extended to tribes who requested that tribal representatives or religious leaders be present during the move, though none were able to be present. In general, the respondents seemed to trust the museum staff to, “do the right thing” (Kreps, 2003, p. 96).

The *Museum Registration Methods 5th Edition* (MRM5), produced by the American Association of Museums and edited by Rebecca Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, provides a set of best practices for museum registration and collections management. The MRM5 includes a chapter by Alison Edwards titled, “Care of Sacred and Culturally Sensitive Objects”. The chapter addresses a series of questions that have arisen from what they term as “demands for reform” (Edwards, 2010, p. 408). They begin with how to answer the question: what is sacred? Edwards

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answers this with, “Museum staff should not attempt to define what is sacred for a group. Rather, staff must seek to work with legitimate representatives of established traditions to determine what objects are sacred, integral, or essential to a living culture or region” (2010, p. 410). She suggests that museum representatives develop definitions and guidelines in partnership with affiliated communities, citing both NAGPRA and the NMAI Act for policies and codes of ethics (Edwards, 2010). She stresses the importance of accommodating religious practices, developing sustainable, long-lasting relationships with affiliated groups, documenting those interactions when appropriate, and, “devising repatriation, care, exhibition, research and archival practices consistent with the cultural importance and purpose of the object” (p. 421). Edwards also notes that while American museums are not bound by any legal force to work with source communities to repatriate, or develop new care protocols, “a concern for social justice and ethics should lead them to do so” (p. 421) and that museums should acknowledge the, “sometimes painful historic circumstances that brought sacred materials into museums, and recognize cultural knowledge as they conserve, research, exhibit, and interpret sacred and sensitive objects” (p. 422). Museums are also encouraged to be mindful of situations where the cultural integrity of the object is valued over the preservation of the physical object as, “to preserve a sacred object in violation of its meaning is not preservation” (p. 422).

Much of the literature surrounding traditional care of objects centers around sacred, ‘culturally sensitive’, or objects of cultural patrimony. There is little research or sets of protocols which outline strategies for ways to incorporate other knowledge systems into the care of objects and materials that do not necessarily fall into this category.

This research will also address projects which work to connect source communities with archival materials, in addition to objects. Archives take on additional significance, beyond just

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cultural, for Native American communities in that they can serve a legal purpose for sovereign tribal governments. One result of years of genocide and oppression of Native Americans in the United States is that the majority of archival records which document Native American culture and histories are held in non-native repositories (O'Neal, 2013). Tribal leaders, archivists, and librarians have expressed interests in improving relationships with the non-native institutions which hold Native American archival materials. In response to this interest, a group of Native and non-native archivists, librarians, curators, historians, and anthropologists got together in 2006 to create a set of protocols for those working with Native American archival materials. *The Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* were created specifically to identify best practices for culturally responsive care and use of archival materials held by non-tribal institutions. *The Protocols* begin by asserting that “libraries and archives must recognize that Native American communities have primary rights for all culturally sensitive materials that are culturally affiliated with them. These rights apply to issues of collection, preservation, access, and use of or restrictions to these materials” (Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, 2007). This is the baseline on which the rest of the protocols operate. *The Protocols* provide guidelines for archives and libraries as well as for Native communities working with these institutions. The guidelines advocate for consultation with Native American community members at every level. These guidelines push non-tribal archivists to examine their assumptions about established Western archival practices, restrict access to culturally sensitive materials, evaluate their holdings and transfer Native collections that fall outside of their institution’s scope to the community, and to avoid prolonging the life cycle of sensitive material if requested by the community (Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, 2007). These are only a few of the many guidelines suggested in the protocols. When *The Protocols* were officially released

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2006 they were met with controversy. The drafters requested that the guidelines be endorsed by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) but *The Protocols* were so divisive among archivists that the SAA developed a task force to discuss and review the issues surrounding them and hosted a three-session forum which took place at the SAA annual meetings from 2009-2011. After the final forum during which many repositories agreed to support *The Protocols*, the SAA still does not endorse them (O’Neal, 2013). Though they have been endorsed by the American Association for State and Local History, First Archivists Circle, and the Native American Archives Roundtable, a section of the SAA. The *Protocols* have been criticized by archivists for going against traditional archival practices by limiting universal access, which they see as a fundamental tenant of archival ethics, and for creating an impossible work load for repositories that are already understaffed and underfunded (Bolcer, 2009). Others see *The Protocols* fitting well within the theoretical concepts of community and participatory archives and the model of social justice archives which have become popular in the post-custodial era. Some suggest that *The Protocols* will push the field to embrace to wider variety of worldviews (O’Neal, 2013). While there is little written in terms of guidelines for working with non-Native source community archives, many of these protocols could be utilized. One example of a community based archives project is taking place at the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan. The archive was started in 2010 and because they are starting from scratch, they are able to be intentional about the materials and histories they collect. There is a growing oral history collection and they are continuing to work to build relationships and trust within the community. Through the creation of the archives the AANM hopes to develop greater levels of trust within their constituent communities, “by helping them understand that their histories are important and worth including in the museum” (McBride & Skene, 2013).

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O’Neal in her 2015 article, ““The Right to Know”: Decolonizing Native American Archives”, asserts that the last decade has seen more tribal communities establishing strong archival collections which document their histories, as well as non-tribal repositories collaborating with and developing protocols for Native collections, and the incorporation of indigenous ways of knowing into records management curriculum. That being said, the author still sees significant room for improvement. O’Neal argues for archives to be a profession which evolves to serve the needs of communities that require different methods of access and management (2015). She asserts that,

“archivists should be able to do both in a balanced way—the traditional work of acquiring, accessioning, and processing records, as well as incorporating aspects of social justice into our daily work. Overall, we should perhaps expand our Western theoretical frameworks and open up to the notion that perhaps these theories are not useful for all collections, especially those ethnic communities and other minorities with long histories of oppression and injustices. This expansion will ensure that the profession considers and explores a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing that can positively influence the stewardship of these collections” (2015, p. 15).

Non-tribal museums and archives have found ways to incorporate traditional care into their protocols, but it is only through listening and collaborating with communities that this is possible. The following will begin to explore the variety of projects and work that is being done to connect communities with objects housed in museum collections around the world.

Source Community Collaborative Projects

Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown in their seminal book, *Museums and Source Communities*, provide case studies which describe collaborations between museums and source communities, a practice which they deem, “one of the most important developments in modern museum practice” (2003, p. i). The case studies presented cover a wide range of collaborative projects ranging from elder collections visits (Fienup-Riordan, 2003), reclaiming photographs

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(Binney & Chaplin, 2003) and archival films (Paniataaq Kingson, 2003), to co-curating exhibits (Ames, 2003; Herle, 2003; Shelton, 2003). The opening case study by Ann Fienup-Riordan describes a collaborative project between Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde (now the Ethnologisches Museum) and Yup'ik elders in 1994. The project brought the elders to the German museum to work with the museum's unpublished collection of over 7,000 Yup'ik objects and to bring that information back to Alaska as an act of 'visual repatriation'. This idea of visual repatriation does not seek the physical return of objects to their source communities but instead the return of the knowledge, stories, and histories embodied in those objects. Fienup-Riordan highlights the ways that both the museum and the Yup'ik communities benefitted from the project. The museum was able to add valuable information and context to their collection and the elders were able to bring that information home to share with their community and take ownership over their history. Fienup-Riordan reports some of the museum's reactions to the collections review. Some began the project worried that the Yup'ik elders wished to reclaim the objects, but ultimately were convinced that the elders were happy to use them to learn and teach. The author provides a potent example that highlights how deeply engrained Western museum practices can be.

“During our second week we were confronted with two boxes, each holding a mixture of kayak and harpoon parts. Paul and Wassilie carefully separated them, gave each a name, and described their use, placing kayak parts in one box and harpoon parts in another. When I looked the next day, the museum's collection manager had reordered the ivories according to the original confusion, since that was the way they had historically been located in storage” (p. 32).

The German museum did provide what Fienup-Riordan described as, “ideal circumstances to explore collections” (2003, p. 40) though granting space, time, and privacy. She asserts that this allowed the elders to own the collections, “in ways more restricted access would have made impossible” (2003, p. 40).

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3-D objects are not the only foundation for source community projects. Photographs and other archival materials also hold deep cultural meaning and important histories. Another visual repatriation project involved collaboration between Maori elders and two historians from the University of Auckland to create two books of historic Maori photographs which included histories that, “had not died in individual memories but had been suppressed in the European-recorded historiography” (Binney & Chaplin, 2003, p. 100). The photographs record images of Maori ancestors who exist “as a bond between the living and the dead” (p. 110) and are hung in the meeting houses to retain continuity between generations(2003). Another project visually repatriated historic photographs housed in the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the National Archives of Papua New Guinea, and the National Archives of Australia, to communities in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea. The copies of the photographs became, “sites through which traditions were revisited, contested and publicly discussed, thus giving elders a chance to share unspoken aspects of their individual and collective histories” (2003, p. 119).

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C., one of the sites featured in this study, hosts a number of programs of this nature, some of which have been documented. One such project through NMAI held a series of digital workshops with tribal schools and colleges which allowed students to each choose objects to photograph and research, and to create a virtual exhibit around that object (Christal, Roy, & Cherian, 2005). The study also touches on issues surrounding culturally sensitive objects, Native and non-native relations, and how students can act as ‘culture bearers’ for their communities (Christal, Roy, & Cherian, 2005). Another project contracted a Kwakwaka’wakw artist to come to NMAI and assist in the conservation of a Kwakwaka’wakw mask which represents the Kwakwaka’wakw’s first ancestor

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riding on the back of a sea monster (Johnson, 2007). Some time after the mask was collected by the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (the precursor to NMAI) the first ancestor figure was lost. The artist, Kevin Cranmer, was recommended by two Kwakwaka'wakw community members who had come to NMAI to advise conservators in preparation for an upcoming exhibit. These consultants had selected many of the objects to go on exhibit and they then worked with conservators to show how they worked, how they should be positioned while on exhibit, and collaborated to develop a plan of treatment for the rest of the mask. The artist was provided with a historic photograph which showed the original ancestor figure and measurements in order to create the replacement. After the mask went off exhibit at NMAI it travelled back to the Kwakwaka'wakw U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay to be displayed and utilized by the community there (Johnson, 2007).

Many of the community collaborative projects which appear in the literature are centered around community curated, or co-curated, exhibits. Ruth Phillips in her introduction to the section on community curated exhibits in Peers and Brown's book states that collaborative exhibit development raises questions, "not only about the ways that contemporary museums are repositioning themselves as they respond to the powerful currents of cultural pluralism, decolonization and globalization, but also about the changing relationship between museums and the societies in which they operate" (2003, p.155). Some examples use community collaborations to present multivocal exhibits in which both the museum staff and the community, "worked to find a space of coexistence for multiple perspectives" (Phillips, 2003, p. 164). In the case of the *African Worlds* exhibit at the Horniman Museum in the U.K. they worked with local Black communities to incorporate lived experiences, feelings, and opinions into the re-exhibition of their African ethnographic collections. The panels displayed four levels of text for each object

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which highlighted the voice of a living community member but also included Western modes of understanding the objects (Shelton, 2003). Anita Herle's piece which describes the exhibit, *Torres Strait Islanders: An Exhibition to Mark the Centenary of the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait*, displays the multiple meanings attributed to the events and objects presented by both Islanders and anthropologists, historical and contemporary (2003). The exhibit was designed in consultation with the Torres Strait Indigenous government, other political and cultural leaders, and a Torres Strait Islander employee from the National Museum of Australia. Throughout the exhibit, "different types of knowledge were highlighted in order to illustrate some of the historical and cross-cultural complexities involved in the relationship between the Expedition members, Islanders, missionaries and colonial officers. The juxtaposition of narratives was intended to multiply the shifting and overlapping contexts of the objects on display" (Herle, 2003, p. 198). The intent of these exhibits was to push visitors to consider their own position in relation to colonial anthropology and the displacement of objects, and cultivate an awareness for the "dialogic tension between the European and community partners' point of view" (Phillips, 2003, p. 164).

Amy Lonetree asserts that it is expected that museum professionals seek input from contemporary communities when designing exhibitions which focus on Native American content (2012). In her book, *Decolonizing Museums*, Lonetree examines collaborative exhibit design projects between both tribal and non-tribal museums and indigenous communities (2012). One case study discusses the creation of a "hybrid tribal museum" which involved the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) working with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to open the Mille Lacs Indian Museum. MNHS shared power and privileged the "voices, stories, history, and memory of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe—on their reservation, in their museum" (2012, p. 170).

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Lonetree argues that this project which pursued a “rigorous, community-based, collaborative methodology” (p. 172) set the stage for what would follow in the larger museum world, most notably the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. Lonetree acknowledges NMAI’s collaborative methodologies in exhibit design and the incorporation of Native knowledge systems into their practice but criticizes the museum’s silence around the “hard truths” of colonialism in their exhibits. Lonetree argues that community-collaborative exhibitions are about, “building trust, developing relationships, communicating, sharing authority, and being humble” (2012, p. 170).

While the body of literature addressing collaborative projects of this nature is growing, the projects documented are still primarily exhibit and curatorially based. There is a need for additional works which describe and provide frameworks for other object based community collaborations and how they function in practice.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways that object based collaborations with source communities are shifting and influencing museum collections practices and the role of the museum professional. I asked the following research questions:

1. In what ways are museums physically connecting source communities with objects in museum collections?
2. What is the role of the museum professional in this practice?
3. In what ways, if any, have these practices changed the museum professional's approach when working with objects?

I utilized a qualitative approach to fully explore the variety of ways that museums are doing this work. The intention was to tease out experiences which exemplify a shift, or failure to shift, away from deeply engrained colonial museum practices. Qualitative methodologies are better able to tackle the complexity this topic yields.

I used purposive sampling to draw from a pool of mid-career museum professionals who work regularly with both source communities and objects. A list of possible sites was generated based on their reputation as leaders in the field and once in contact with professionals, the snowball method was used to expand the sampling. The sampling was limited to museum professionals who were actively working with both source communities and objects. There are many museum professionals who work with, and advocate for, museum source community collaborations but do so at an administrative or scholarly level. This study was narrowly focused to examine if the ethic of decolonized source community collaboration work has made its way into daily museum collections practices such as cataloging, storage, care, and conservation. This

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information can best be gathered from those working within these systems every day. These positions include collections managers, curators, conservators, and archivists. Each of these positions were included to provide a variety of perspectives. This mix of positions mimics the variety of voices that influence how an object is used and cared for within the museum space. Source community members themselves were not included because of the limited time frame and scope of this project. I chose to focus instead on the experience of the museum professional—though some identify as members of source communities themselves. It is a limitation of this study that this perspective was not included and future researchers pursuing this topic should do so.

This qualitative study utilized two semi-structured interviews which were administered separately, but in quick succession. The first, and longest, interview was designed to gather information about the ways that museum professionals connect source communities with objects and their role within that practice. The semi-structured interviews gave room for complex responses and opportunities for further probing. Examples included, “Could you describe some of the ways that your institution connects source communities with objects or archival materials?” and “Does any aspect of your personal identity influence or inform your understanding of your professional responsibilities as a (insert job title)?” (See Appendix A).

The second portion of the interview process asked the interviewee to choose an object or group of materials prior to the interview. They were given the instructions to choose an object that is frequently used in community collaborations or stood out as being part of a particularly interesting, meaningful, or challenging collaboration. The participant was then asked a series of questions aimed at collecting narratives around working with objects and communities and gathering information about how the object is cared for, stored, conserved, and cataloged.

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Examples included, “Does this object present any particular challenges for you as a (insert job title)?” and “Has the ____ community influenced how you work with this object?”. It is these narratives which illustrated the lived experiences of the objects and the complexity that surrounds their use and care. By grounding the research in the object itself, I hope to highlight any differences between ideology and practice. Two instruments were developed for this portion of the interview process, one for those working with objects and one for archivists (See Appendix B & C). Because the nature of archivist’s work, or at least the materials they care for, is slightly different from object based work it required a different set of vocabulary with which to talk about them. The primary difference between the two instruments is the use of the word “materials” rather than “object”.

I interviewed employees at two sites. The first is the Burke Museum of Natural History in Seattle, Washington. The Burke is the state museum of Washington and hosts a variety of community collaborative projects with both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The Burke’s mission is, “The Burke Museum creates a better understanding of the world and our place in it. The museum is responsible for the Washington state collections of natural and cultural heritage and sharing the knowledge that makes them meaningful. The Burke welcomes a broad and diverse audience and provides a community gathering place that nurtures lifelong learning and encourages respect, responsibility and reflection” (“About the Burke”, n.d.). The second site is the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C., part of the Smithsonian system. Working closely with indigenous communities has been a central part of NMAI’s mission since its beginnings as the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in New York City. The mission is stated as, “The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures

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of the Western Hemisphere—past, present, and future—through partnership with Native people and others” (“Mission Statement”, n.d.). A total of six interviews were conducted in the

following positions:

Position	NMAI	Burke
Collections Manager	1	2
Curator	0	1
Archivist	1	0
Conservator	1	0

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes.

Chapter 4: Results

Connecting Source Communities and Objects

The first portion of analysis will focus on the first research question proposed in this study. This question asks, in what ways are museums physically connecting source communities with objects in museum collections? The two sites reviewed, The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C., do this in a wide variety of ways.

One of the most direct and lasting methods museums use to connect source communities with objects is through repatriation. Two respondents from NMAI discussed what they both described as an “active” repatriation program. Part of this is the act of returning the object, but repatriation delegations also are able to access collections through visits the storage area. While NAGPRA only applies to federally recognized tribes within the United States, the head archivist at NMAI described scenarios that, “are not called repatriation but functionally are repatriation to communities”. By this he meant instances of international repatriation to Canada and Central America. The archaeology collections manager at the Burke discussed some of the ways that they have gone on to build lasting relationships through their repatriation program. She described what happened after sending out NAGPRA compliant summaries in 1993.

“then we actively, and I would say proactively, then engaged with those communities and said, ‘please come so that we can talk to you about what we have’. And then we often did consultations where we would say, ‘ok these are the objects that we reported to you but you’re here, you can see whatever you want’. (...) So typically those communities would say (...), ‘we would like to see other objects from the larger community’. (...) [or] ‘we would like to see materials from several counties or materials from a certain river’ (...) then we just show people whatever they want to see. (...) We’ve had groups say, ‘hey can I see the Egyptian Mummy?’. It’s just making connections with people and a lot of Native people (...) have felt that museums were really closed off to them and so this is just one tiny step towards trying to help people feel (...) they have access. And so (...) that tends to be how we move forward. Now, and this is, you know well over 25 years of

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NAGPRA. So now (...) people know us and often there will be a preservation committee group for a tribe or a cultural community, or the tribal historic preservation officer and they will contact us and say, 'hey we're interested in a tour or can we come look at what you have'. (...) those happen fairly frequently."

This is an instance where the process of repatriation resulted in relationships that extended years beyond NAGPRA consultations.

Two of the respondents from NMAI mentioned instances where objects are put on long term loan to tribal museums. The head archivist described this process as placing objects in their communities of origin to, "make them easier for community tradition bearers and artists and the public to access". He discussed a specific partnership with the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center which involves a long-term loan of Zuni ceramics that, "have been there for quite a long time and we have no intention of ending that anytime soon".

Some described more formalized programs that bring community members and objects together. NMAI has several programs which allow Native communities to come into the storage spaces for research visits that can last up to two weeks. Both the archivist and collections manager at NMAI described a Native artist in residency program which was on hold at the time of the interview. The program brought Native artists into the museum to use the collections to inform their art. The archives department also hosted a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow, Shan Goshorn, who created pieces which re-contextualized archival photographs and documents. NMAI also hosts a language recovery program during which people can come in to see objects and then there is a formal process of video-taping discussions in their native language. NMAI respondents also mentioned a Native internship program which includes both Native and non-Native students working in the collections department.

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Both the collections manager and the curator at the Burke described a program which they refer to as the Research Family. The Research Family, which began as the Research Sisters but was later expanded to include male students, is a group of University of Washington students who are primarily Pacific Islanders. The group, who now meets as a class taught by the curator, began as a group of young women interested in empowering each other, learning about their respective communities, and teaching the Pacific Islander Youth in the Seattle area. The class meets in the collections lab/storage space and they take on a variety of individual projects. One such project has students chose objects in the Burke collection to research. Most of the information currently in the Burke database is descriptive, used mainly for documenting the object so that it can be found again in storage. There is little in the way of cultural context. The collections manager described how the Research Family has been able to begin to add context,

“They provide that context through working with their families, their communities, and doing (...) traditional Western research but the research family really tries to employ all indigenous learning systems. So it’s not just about doing research in (...) published literature (...) you learn in many different ways in indigenous communities. Perhaps (...) you’re part of a weaving group and in that weaving group, yes you’re learning how to weave, but you’re also hearing the stories of your community from the aunties and the ladies that are there. And you’re also learning about (...) social ways, (...) protocols, things that the women would do, gender roles, things the men would do etc. So trying to use all of these different kind of learning systems in order to bring meaning and life to our collections objects”.

Both the curator and the collections manager stressed the importance of reciprocity in these relationships with students and their respective communities. The curator said they are, “looking to cultivate win-win situations where source communities see that their engagement with the objects are valuable to everyone involved”. One area of engagement in which she expressed particular interest was inviting source community members, particularly elders, to the university to,

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“join hands with us in teaching and training the young people. And (...) to disrupt any notion that education for the students is dichotomous. They have their community or family learning on the one hand and then they have their UW education on the other. We don’t want those realms to be separated. What we look for is to create those connections and synergies between them. So by inviting members of source communities into UW to assist with training the young people alongside us, (...) the goal is to create new partnerships where source community members are pleased that we’re investing in their young people and training them to be the strongest possible resources they can be for their own communities and that in turn makes the community members want to work with us because they see how it benefits their young people. So, the objects are the intermediaries to that because the objects are the focal point for student research. So, by combining the types of research that universities and communities can explore together it creates a larger realm of knowledge for the students”.

The project is rooted in the objects, but the meaning and significance comes through the relationships between the students and their communities. Additional projects undertaken by members of the Research Family will be described later in this chapter.

The Burke works with source community members to conduct collections reviews. According to the collections manager these reviews are, “not done from a Western perspective of (...) trying to fill holes in the collection and [get] what we would consider a comprehensive collection. (...) Our collections reviews really focus on enhancing and creating more meaningful cultural context for the objects that we currently have”. Community members are invited into the collections space and depending on the size of the collection they may view a selection of objects or every object from that culture. They are able to handle the objects, take photos, draw them, “whatever they want to do in order to connect with those objects and then they tell us what they think we should know about those objects”. The collections manager stresses that the museum doesn’t have much of an agenda for these reviews other than “enhancing our data and to connect them with their cultural objects”. The community members aren’t directed in any way with specific questions but rather, “those things come out (...) when we’re talking and that communication is flowing and trust is being built between us and the community. And those

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conversations just flow more easily”. She described an archive review project, where a library archives graduate student, who is Maori, is working to identify people and places in historic Maori photographs. She has collaborated with museums in New Zealand who have the original images in their collections to find more information about them. These reviews are not centered solely on three dimensional objects.

The Burke curator also discussed the collections review process, specifically the department’s work with the Tongan community. The ongoing reviews involve getting feedback about which objects are most valuable to the community, where they came from, what their needs are, as well as reviewing the department’s ethics and protocols. The head archivist at NMAI discussed something similar, though did not use the term ‘collections review’. Rather he described a “very basic thing that we do,” which involves talking to community members about collections, often photographs, as “there are people in communities who know a great deal more about these photographs than we do and we try to capture that information and get it into our catalogue records whenever possible”.

For the conservators at NMAI much of their work with objects is exhibit driven. When objects are being treated before going on exhibit the conservation department engages with source communities as a part of their conservation methodology. They reach out to community members with a particular expertise or cultural knowledge and invite them to come to the museum and be a part of the conservation process. Those community members may discuss the materials used to make the object, the cultural use, display preferences, or wishes to restrict access or conservation treatments. During this collaborative process there is access to the collection and this often connects community members with objects that “either have never been

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seen or have been lost in the community” and from this arise, “different possibilities for partnership or engagement”.

Many instances of community members working with objects seem to have arisen organically either out of prior relationships or by community members reaching out to the museum looking for ways to engage with their community’s collections. All three of the participants at the Burke discussed relationships and projects that arose in this idiosyncratic way. The archaeology collections manager works closely with both tribal historic preservation officers and tribal archaeologists. Source community members are her colleagues and they often serve on cultural committees together. This relationship creates opportunities for more informal interactions. She described these casual visits, saying “if I find something cool in the collection that I think is important for them to know about, I just pick up the phone and say, ‘hey, look what we’ve found’ or ‘hey, do you want to come see this’ (...) it’s a small community. You just call them and let them know what you have”.

The ethnology curator gave an example of a project which also emerged out of existing relationships. A Tongan student had begun to research pieces in the collection through a class taught by the curator. She then invited her mother to visit the Burke. According to the curator,

“her mother saw the work that was going on and created more and more ownership about the kinds of knowledge production that was happening in relation to the Tongan objects. So the mother now comes independently without the daughter and the mother is leading a review of our entire Tongan collection and giving us feedback about which objects are most valuable to community members, where they came from, what needs to be cared for, reviewing our ethics, our protocols, everything. So, it came out of a relationship”.

The curator sees the students as “ambassadors” because they arrive at the university with strong family and community connections. She elaborated by saying, “We don’t have those connections

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but the students trust us to share those relationships. And so, the students are ambassadors to the new communities”.

The Hmong Preservation Project 2016 was another project which arose from these trusted connections and one that I was involved with through my work, both as a Burke employee and a student of the curator. The project began when a member of the Hmong community heard from her friend, the mother of the University of Washington student, about her work with the Tongan collection. The curator believed, “I would not have been able to start the relationship with [name omitted] and the Hmong community had we not had a successful relationship with [name omitted] and the Tongan community”. The project started with this Hmong community member visiting the Burke just to see what Hmong objects were in the collection. Upon seeing the objects,

“she became very inspired to then bring in members of the youth community and connecting them with elders from the community to really get a holistic perspective, especially for members of the community who were born here in the United States and had never maybe even been to their homeland and didn’t experience first-hand the persecution and (...) being a refugee, and only have known what being an American of Hmong ancestry was like” (Collections Manager).

The project spanned many months during which Hmong youth (primarily high school and college aged) would come to the collections space, often on weekends, to work with objects. Each person chose an object from the Burke’s collection to research. This took on a similar form to the Research Family’s projects in that they consulted with books and online resources but also reached out to family members and elders in their community to learn about the cultural context of the objects. The project culminated in a one day exhibit that was presented at the Hmong New Year celebration in Seattle. The objects were brought to the event venue and the community members curated an exhibit around them. The exhibit also featured photographs that were taken in the Burke storage space. The photos played with the notions of past and present and showed

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the students using the traditional Hmong objects and then juxtaposed them with modern versions. For example, one student chose a traditional instrument. One photo was of him with the traditional instrument and the other showed him singing into a microphone.¹ The project arose organically and was driven by the community, the Burke merely showed up with the objects.

Object Narratives

The second half of the interviews invited the participants to select an object, collection of objects, or archival materials which have been used during source community collaborations. This portion was intended to parse out narratives showing how these collaborations function in reality, therefore rooting the research in concrete experiences. The questions were designed to examine the ways objects are used by communities and discuss what this means for the museum professional. For example, do these objects present any particular challenges for the museum professional? Does working with the community affect the way that the objects or materials are stored, cared for, researched, or used?² Each participant had a different perspective as they occupy different roles within the institution. They chose objects that exemplify the variety of ways that museums and communities work together to act as stewards for these objects.

Burke Museum: jaki-ed.

Two of the participants at the Burke, an ethnology collections manager and an ethnology curator, chose the same object to discuss for this portion of the interview. They both selected a jaki-ed, traditional woven clothing from the Marshall Islands. The jaki-ed is mat-like in appearance and is worn like a skirt. It is tied on with a cord or belt. The Burke examples are

¹ While both the curator and the collections manager discussed the Hmong Preservation Project, these additional details about the exhibit came from my own personal experience assisting with this specific project.

² See appendix for interview questions.

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woven from pandanus and hibiscus fronds. When the Marshall Islands were colonized the tradition of weaving and wearing jaki-eds went dormant. The two jaki-eds housed at the Burke were originally identified as mats in the database and stored in large Hollinger boxes with many other mats stacked on top of each other, interlaid with acid-free tissue. This is common storage for textiles at the Burke. The jaki-eds were identified as such by individuals from the University of the South Pacific who saw photos of them, then labeled as mats, on the Burke's online collections database in 2010. They reached out to the collections manager (who no longer works with the Oceanic collection and was not interviewed for this study) and identified them as jaki-eds. The two jaki-eds in the Burke collection are quite old, from the 19th century, and were likely culturally used, meaning they were worn and not produced for sale as many of the newer made jaki-eds are. This made them rare. Once they were identified and word spread that these examples existed, the jaki-eds have been utilized by the community in a variety of ways.

The Jaki-ed Revival Program was created by two Marshallese women for master weavers in the Marshall Islands. Weaving traditions have remained vibrant but not this style of jaki-ed. The Jaki-ed Revival Program is working to revitalize the practice. Because of the increased demand for access to these jaki-eds the Burke was asked to be a part of a virtual museum created by the Jaki-ed Revival Program. The Virtual Museum of Marshallese Fine Weaving shows photos of the Revival's projects as well as features jaki-eds which are housed in museum collections in the U.S, U.K., Germany, and New Zealand. The Burke is one of four museums in the U.S. that hold historic jaki-eds in their collections.

The jaki-eds are used locally as well as virtually. March 1, 2016 marked the 52nd anniversary of the detonation of the largest thermonuclear weapon test ever conducted by the U.S. in the Marshall Islands. The Research Sisters, a group of University of Washington students

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of Pacific Islander heritage who work regularly with Burke collections, planned an event to be hosted at the Burke as a remembrance day. The program was meant to honor the Marshallese community, give them a space to mourn, and connect with their culture as many can never return to the Marshall Islands. The curator interviewed described the experience,

“The Marshallese community said they needed strength on that day and they needed to come in and visit their ancestors and that their ancestors reside in the jaki-ed. The jaki-ed that we have are from the late 1800s, they don’t exist in the Marshall Islands, they were made by their ancestors. And the importance to the community, their most sorrowful day of the year, to come in and have that tactile experience with their ancestors was imperative to their healing and their need to feel connected to something larger than themselves that day. There’s incredible solace that emerged from those jaki-ed. And the ability of objects to heal is something that we’re only just exploring”.

The Marshallese community’s desire to touch and handle the jaki-ed was a topic of discussion in both interviews. Both noted balancing the preservation of the jaki-ed with the community’s wish to handle them, something the collections manager and curator see as the community’s right, as the greatest challenge presented by these objects. The two jaki-eds are embrittled and old. The Burke’s lack of environmental controls (which will be improved once they move into a new building in 2019) have led to fluctuations in humidity and temperature which have left the jaki-eds so fragile that fibers break off with any touch or movement. At some point they were folded, because of space issues, which led to breakage along the center. In the boxes where they were stored they were difficult to access as multiple layers of woven mats would have to be removed every time they were pulled. This repeated handling was damaging for the other mats in the box as well. Their unstable condition also means that the jak-eds are unable to be put on exhibit. The collections manager and curator who were interviewed did not want to curb the handling of the jaki-eds by the Marshallese community, but of course preservation is a concern. The collections manager summed up the challenge, saying, “How do you balance those concerns with the desire

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to connect the communities with these pieces and allow them to touch them, and basically touch their ancestors. That is what they're doing". The curator discussed this conflict as well-

"The jaki-ed are very old. They are in need of repair and Marshallese want to touch them a lot, and they want to pull at the loose fibers, yank on them. And they are being degraded by people touching them. No question. By the same token if we stop that interaction with them, the appreciation for them would go away. And so I think we have the ethical dilemma of museums who want to preserve, and pass things on to future generations come in conflict with the need to create contemporary connections to those objects that are strong and often direct."

Several steps have been taken to remedy the situation. The jaki-eds have been removed from their original storage and had specialized storage mounts created for them. These 'flip-folders' are made by layering thin strips of blue-board to create a frame-like box which is then attached to a piece of board. Batting, muslin, and tyvec was added to each side to create a pillow against which the jaki-ed can lay. It is opened like a book and the padding on both sides means that the jaki-ed can be easily flipped and viewed/handled on either side. The movement of flipping continues to damage the jaki-ed, but providing them with additional support mitigates the damage. The box was made by two Micronesian students, with the assistance of the collections manager. The curator thought being trained to make the storage mount, "got the Micronesian students involved in caring for the jaki-ed, which they enjoyed. So, part of creating the new box was getting the Micronesian students to take ownership over the caretaking involved in the museum work".

At the time of the interviews the jaki-eds were about to have an objects conservator assess them. Because of funding limitations, a local conservator who volunteers in the department agreed to do a condition report of both jaki-eds and give a cost estimate for stabilization. The treatment that would be done would not change the integrity of the piece but

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would most likely be a removable piece which would stabilize the creases and the breakage due to folding.

Both the new storage and the conservation came as a direct result of the Marshallese community's connection with and love for these objects. The ethnology department houses over 50,000 objects so this level of care, space, and funding cannot be given to every object. The collections manager described this process,

“So we spent the resources to create, and the time to create these mounts for these specific objects when many of them don't have something like this. And it is because it is so revered by the community (...) you know we try to treat everything in the collection with the same respect. Why would you have something in the permanent collection if it wasn't important? And because we can't make that determination of (...) what is important to a community member. It might to you look like a stick, but it might be (...) the most amazing thing to a community member and it might have (...) a sense of a life of its own or personhood so to speak. So we can't make that determination so we treat everything the same (...) except for in the cases where the community says this is more important than something else. Because of their reverence for it, then we have more reverence for it”.

The curator also noted that once they realized how important the jaki-ed was to the community, they took steps to change the way the object was stored. In the case of the Burke's jaki-ed, the Marshallese community completely altered the way they were being stored, conserved, researched, used, and even identified.

Burke Museum: sewage treatment plants and net weights.

The third participant from the Burke was a collections manager in the archaeology department. It became clear through our interview that working with archaeological collections is a different experience to ethnographic collections. Some collections procedures differ and materials are not identified by culture, as they are in ethnology, but rather by location. To use the participant's example, rather than identifying an object as Makah, it would be said to be from Neah Bay, as that is where the materials were excavated. These collections have a variety of

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stake holders including the museum, the legal owners of the land where the materials were excavated, and the source communities—in this case tribal and governments.

Two projects were discussed during this portion of the interview. The first was an extensive collection of artifacts, around 200 boxes, from the West Point site which is now the sewage treatment plant for Seattle. Excavated in the early 1990's, the collection is not owned by the Burke but rather is held in trust for the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, and the Tulalip Tribes. King County, because they own the land, also has a seat at the table. There is a committee of five which manages the collection, on which this collections manager, three tribal members, and a King County representative sit. The committee has worked collaboratively to find ways to engage the community with the collection. According to the archaeology collections manager, "it's not one object that's important, but it's what that collection has to say about place, especially in Seattle where Native people were forced out". One complexity of this relationship is that there are three tribes with cultural ties to this collection. As the collections manager put it, "the tribes would all love to be housing [this collection] as well but how do you split it up? How do you make that work?". One idea which came out of the committee was to develop education kits which featured replicas of some of the artifacts from this site. A professional was hired to make detailed replicas from the same materials as the original artifacts including beaver teeth, elk antler, flint knapped stone tools, and ground deer bone. Every tribe has at least one kit that they use for educating the community and the Burke also has one for school visits. An exhibit was developed and put on display at the sewage treatment plant which featured replicas of artifacts, and interviews with Native community members about why water quality is important. In this case, it is less that the community is engaging directly with the 200 odd boxes of materials but that the knowledge generated by the collection is being utilized in a variety of ways.

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As in the previous Burke example, the topic of contemporary relevance was brought up in this interview. The collections manager described an experience of working on this committee, saying-

“One of the elders on the committee said to me, ‘Tell me why I should care about archaeology, how does it speak to me? I know these sites. I know my ancestors (...) I learned from them in many ways and I don’t need to dig up the sites to learn that.’ (...) full well understanding that a lot of time archaeology is done, for the most part in Washington state, is done because the site is going to be impacted or damaged, so (...) you’re sort of saving what’s left, right? And (...) he said, ‘You tell me (...) what’s important about this site. What is (...) critical? (...) My tribe is faced with some major challenges, one of which is diabetes and health care’. And so the committee (...) met, and said yeah, what we do should be relevant to today. And of course, archaeologists think what we do is relevant to today but (...) he charged us with really trying to come up with a way of making it impactful to today”.

A decision was then made to analyze many different sites in the area to see what people ate in the past and how this can inform food diversity now. Community work around health and food has sprung out of this research and provided support for the growing movement to develop farms and community gardens. As the collections manager put it, “it’s not that people come visit the collection, it’s that they get something out of it in a different way”. This is a unique example in this study, as it uses the collection in an entirely different way, but a way that has been chosen by the community to fit their needs.

The second object chosen for discussion was a net weight used for fishing from the Columbia river. This particular net weight was donated by the daughter of its collector. She knew it was from the Columbia river but there was little information about it. A group from the Wanapum Tribe was visiting the museum and looking at fishing materials from the Columbia river. The collections manager said, “Oh, we have this net weight that’s really interesting. I don’t know anything about it, can I show it to you?”. They looked at the weight, said it was interesting, and went about their visit. Months later, one of the people who had looked at the net weight

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called and said there were some fishermen who were interested in looking at it again. So, a group came to the museum, studied the weight, and tried to determine how it was made and what the materials were. They also found one in the Smithsonian collection and at Central Washington University. There are no others in existence. The other two weights, identified as gillnet hoop weights, are both from one specific area, so it is believed that this is true of the Burke example as well. The Native people on this region of the Columbia river were forced off their land with very little notice, so it is thought that fishermen in particular would have had to leave their caches of nets behind, leaving some of that knowledge with them. According to the collections manager, “this is one way of gaining some of that knowledge back. They’re super excited about it and I suspect that there will be continued visits and I think they’re making replicas of this now”. The net weight is stored in its own box with information about the net weight and drawings which depict how the nets would have been used. This allows for visitors to easily access the net weight and get interpretation about it within the storage space. In this example we again see objects being used by community members to reinvigorate technologies that have gone dormant due to colonization.

NMAI: Zuni films.

The first participant from the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was the head archivist. Archives have their own set of protocols for care and preservation, one that is separate from objects. At NMAI, unlike the Burke, they are housed in two separate departments. The head archivist chose to share with me a project which used grant funding to preserve a series of ethnographic films featuring Zuni communities in 1923. Researchers from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, NMAI’s predecessor, were sent to Zuni to excavate two archaeological sites and conduct ethnographic research, out of which came a series of motion

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picture films. There are eleven films in the series titled, *Ethnographic Films of the Zuni Indians of New Mexico*. The first film is an introduction with landscape shots and some information about farming practices. Six of the films are focused on specific practices such as grinding corn and making bread, building a house, making pottery, weaving a blanket, tanning deer skin, and the process of making soap, which was used for hair washing and styling. Four of the films are ceremonial and of, what the archivist described as, “increasingly sensitive subject matter”. These films have deteriorated over time. They have been the subject of several different preservation efforts which caused some of the content to be lost. Some had deteriorated so much that pieces of film had to be cut out and thrown away. The department made the decision to apply for a series of grants to preserve the films.

During the grant application process, the archivist reached out to Jim Enote, the director of the A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center, for a letter of support. Per the archivist, “He wrote back with something that, I think he had no idea how he was going to sort of impact my life with this, but he wrote back, ‘that sounds great but we don’t write letters of support for projects that we’re not involved in so what is our role to play in this?’”. This “stumped” the archivist as the process of film preservation from the museum’s side involves sending the film to a preservation lab and waiting for the results. He suggested that once the films were preserved they could develop a collaborative project with the digitized film. Here we see another example, as was expressed in the project the Burke archaeologist discussed, of the demand for reciprocity and collaboration coming from the community. In these situations it appears that the community has had to push for their own inclusion. In these instances, the museum professionals were eager to do so but it required an insistence from the community.

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This conversation took place between 2010 and 2011. With a letter of support from the A:shiwi A:wana Museum the NMAI archives were able to get grant funding from a variety of sources, including internal Smithsonian funding pools, to get what he described as the “Cadillac deluxe approach” for film preservation. This process involved taking multiple copies of the films which contained different content, as they had been copied and reworked over the years, and merging them into a new motion picture. The process involved digitizing the motion picture but part of the preservation outcome was new physical film. At the time of this project the preservation standards were changing and now films are reworked almost exclusively into digital versions.

At one point in time, long before this preservation effort, someone had projected the old films onto a wall and filmed them with a video camera. The quality was poor. The camera work was crooked, the colors were wrong, it had been projected at the wrong speed. “It just looked awful but it was also better than nothing at all,” noted the archivist. Copies of this video made their way to the A:shiwi A:wana Museum in the late 90’s or early 2000s so the community knew about the films but had only seen low quality versions that were pieced together and difficult to interpret. After the films were preserved, high quality DVDs were sent to the Zuni community. The archivist described their reactions as follows,

“I’ve gotten feedback from them that people in the community adore these films. They watch them all the time and they’ve learned a lot from them. They’ve learned a lot about traditional farming, they’ve learned a lot about traditional pottery and deer skin tanning. You know, it’s been a really positive thing (...) One of the things I think is really interesting about it is it’s a way that their community can connect with their past, and with our collections, that (...) isn’t locked up in a case and it isn’t kind of off limits in a way. They take these DVD’s to like, the prison, and to like the assisted living facility and they just show them wherever and people really connect with them. And I think some of that also has to do with just a really interesting kind of emotional response people have to motion pictures. Watching a film is different from looking at a photograph and it’s different from reading a book and it’s different from listening to a piece of music. It’s a

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carrier of knowledge that people react to in a unique way. So that's been really gratifying."

At the time of the interview it was only a few weeks prior that NMAI and the A:shiwi A:wam Museum sat down to start planning a long term collaborative project involving the films.

When asked if these materials were unique in the way they were treated and cared for the archivist made the distinction that "they aren't unique in how they're treated, they are unique materials". This ties back to the collections manager's response in discussing the care of the jakied that each object is treated with the same level of respect but some objects stand out as unique because of their significance to a particular community. The archivist went on to say, "We're just too large an organization, we have collections from hundreds if not thousands of communities and we kind of have to systematize how we deal with some of this stuff or we would never manage it". This touches on the challenge that large, encyclopedic museums face. There just isn't enough time in the day to do this kind of individualized, time and resource consuming work with every object.

Including archivists in this study was a decision that was made with much consideration. I am not a trained archivist and many of the procedures and language used in archival work differs greatly from object based museum work. But as I reached out to museum professionals to participate in this study archivist's names kept appearing as people who were doing this kind of work. This example is a step removed from the rest of the study as it is not connecting the community with the "authentic" materials. The experience of watching a film seems to transcend the physical in the same way that the other examples show a visceral connection to the objects.

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NMAI: Yurok and Hupa dance regalia.

A collections manager at NMAI chose to share her work with visiting tribal members from the Yurok and Hupa tribes from Northern California. The specific objects chosen were dance regalia used for the White Deer dances and woodpecker feather headdresses. These are examples of sacred objects. Annual ceremonies of renewal or healing are still danced in Northern California. Because of the sacredness of these objects, the collections manager notes that, “they need to be treated with respect as living beings”. Tribal members influenced the care and handling of these sacred objects in a variety of ways. Some of these pieces may only be handled by males, and some by only females. The staff is primarily female so some of the male-handling only objects present a challenge. The objects are labeled in storage as ‘male-handle only’ or ‘female-handle only’. Some protocols allow those of the restricted gender to move the tray in which the object sits without touching the object itself. If direct handling is necessary, there are two men on staff who can be tasked with moving those objects. Some of these objects have restrictions as to who can view them. The museum accommodates this by either putting them on higher shelves or covering them with muslin cloth. They make sure that the objects won’t be casually viewed by tour groups or other people that may be coming through the storage space.

One of the challenges of working with these objects is that there are some differences in preferences between the tribes of Northern California. The collections manager touched on the complexity of working with multiple communities who are all invested in the collection.

“The Hupa tribe, for example, agreed to have white deer skins, which are mounted on poles with woodpecker decorations, on public display at our museum downtown. Their neighbors immediately adjacent, the Yurok people, object to that and so we’ve actually repatriated white deer skins back to the Yurok. But we still have white deer skins on display with the blessing of the Hupas so (...) the challenge is just being aware and listening to each tribe, what their particular restriction is and not making the assumption that one applies to the other.”

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This work is idiosyncratic. Each community, each object has its own set of protocols and best practices for its care and treatment. It is only through listening to the wishes of the community and not resting on assumptions that we can move forward in respectful, productive collaboration.

NMAI: Tlingit spruce root baskets.

The final group of objects discussed were Tlingit spruce root baskets chosen by an objects conservator at NMAI. The museum has a substantial spruce root basket collection that has torn extensively during its time in storage. They were repaired with linen tape and hide glue, and in some cases, the hide glue has shrunk and the repair itself is causing more damage. Due to the damage and unsightly repairs, the baskets were not selected for exhibitions and were left sitting on a shelf. The NMAI conservation lab hosts Mellon Fellows and when one fellow was interested in basketry and vegetal fibers, it was suggested she take on the Tlingit baskets as a project. The fellow began to explore why the spruce root baskets were tearing more than the others. She did a lot of analysis and came back to the conservator with the conclusion that she wouldn't be able to answer that question without talking to a weaver. The fellow was put in touch with a Tlingit master weaver who specialized in raven's tail robes and spruce root baskets. According to the conservator, when they spoke with the master weaver for the first time she said, "Oh my gosh I'm so glad you called. She said, you know, I get calls all the time to do cultural demonstrations and to talk about the cultural [meaning] or the design, but she goes (...), I have all of these ideas about the materials and I would love to use your scientific equipment to help me answer some of these questions". This is another instance of the source community member making the push for a reciprocal relationship. The weaver told the conservators that you cannot understand the baskets unless you know how to make them, so the decision was made to hold a workshop. The weaver had the idea to send spruce roots from Alaska to the NMAI Cultural

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Resources Center. The weaver travelled to NMAI to lead the work shop, and insisted that all the conservators who have big Tlingit basketry collections be invited because she said, “If I’m going to say this and do this, I only want to do it once”. Conservators from the American Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of Natural History, and students from several conservation graduate programs all attended the workshop. They roasted the spruce roots in the lawn outside the Cultural Resources Center, removed the bark and split the roots. Samples were taken throughout the processing of the roots so they could be viewed under a microscope to see what was happening at the cellular level.

The Mellon Fellow who was spearheading the project and the weaver developed a partnership. According to the conservator,

“They didn’t agree on everything which was really interesting. (...) It was like this great fluidity between (...) what we could offer here and what we have, and what expertise we could apply and then with [the master weaver] and (...) her empirical knowledge as a weaver. For thousands of years Tlingit women have been doing this so it was this really amazing exchange of information”.

This began what the conservator described as a “fundamental” relationship with the weaver. The conservator interviewed and the Mellon fellow were able to travel to Alaska to visit the weaver and, “we harvested spruce roots with her and we looked and understood the clan structure better by seeing eagles and ravens in the sky. You know, this whole picture started to develop”.

Another Mellon fellow picked up the project and continued to remove the tape repairs from the baskets in the collection. Through this project they began to,

“fundamentally look at not just what about these objects and what do we do, but looking at the objects in storage, on the shelves, and say ok what is their purpose now? And really generating different discussions about their use. (...) Their use beyond just an educational program or an exhibit. What is their use, what are they doing here?”.

The conservator felt that the project had begun to “get a little further down that path” toward reciprocity. It, “started to break down a lot of those kind of gate keeping paradigms or those

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structures that exist and really started to (...) represent true partnership”. The weaver saw the baskets housed at NMAI as mentors for weavers back in Sitka. They began to work on a project which could return the baskets to the Tlingit weaving community in Alaska, either physically or using iPads and high quality images that would show the weave structure. Unfortunately, this hasn’t happened yet and the weaver involved in the project sadly passed away. The conservator continued to speak on the need to build reciprocal relationships with source communities, and commented on where she felt institutions were still lacking. “A lot of these interactions are one-way,” she said. “It’s a lot of (...) people coming to the museum and sharing information but the benefits back really need (...) a lot more attention. That has to be a lot more of a focus kind of going forward, (...) what does that look like?”. This project, while it hasn’t been taken to the next step of returning the baskets, did build an infrastructure and foundation of care for the baskets in collaboration the Tlingit master weaver. The conservator believes that it will be a “tribute to her legacy (..) to actually do this, to implement it. (...) That project stands out as one that is moving us closer to where we want to be. And it’s not just in the, ‘can you give us information’, it’s in the decision making part”. She sees the power lying in the ability to make decisions regarding the way collections are cared for. Traditionally, this power has remained firmly in the hands of the museum professional. In the following section we will begin to explore some of the ways museum professionals perceive their role, and the power they yield in relation to objects and source community collaborations.

The Role of The Museum Professional

The second research question asks: what is the role of the museum professional in this practice? Each of the participants was asked, “what is your role during the meetings/visits/etc?” but they discussed their role during various portions of the interview. While the answers varied,

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most people saw themselves occupying multiple roles ranging anywhere from logistical planning, to playing host, to breaking down barriers to access.

Many of the participants discussed some of the more mundane parts of their jobs. The ethnology collections manager at the Burke saw her position as more “behind the scenes” in comparison to the curator. She perceives the curator to be the “public face” to whom communities will reach out and then go on to work more directly with her to schedule visits and handle logistics. The NMAI conservator also considered doing the initial outreach, talking with the community members about the idea and gauge their willingness as a part of her role. She “then really follow through with all of the logistics planning, and that can be from making travel arrangements to actually planning out what (...) are those days going to look like here and working with people (...) to kind of figure that out”. She also saw building long term relationships as part of her role. This involves spending the time to maintain those relationships, which may be as simple as a phone call to ask how they are doing. Beyond the logistics of scheduling and travel, there are other aspects of planning and preparation that go into these collaborations.

The conservator discussed coordinating with the other conservators and staff in the lab. Decisions must be made about the level of documentation that will be done and what notes and images will be given to visiting community members. The process of selecting objects to work with is also handled by many of these professionals, often in collaboration with the community members. The archaeology collections manager at the Burke saw her role as “listening and really trying to get at what people are interested in, because people [who] are not involved directly in a museum have no idea what our collections are comprised of so if I’m not listening to what their interests are, it’s hard for me to help them determine what they might want to look at”. The

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archaeology department does not have their collections online so the collections manager noted that “it’s really a disservice for me to say, ‘hey what do you want to see?’. That does not help them at all”. The archaeology collections manager looks to find a way to “empower people to be able to say (...) ‘I am interested in basketry, do you have anything that might be helpful in (...) sparking (...) another technique or learning a new skill or whatever. That runs the gambit”. This selection process takes on additional complexity at NMAI due to the inherently complicated organizational structure. Native American collections are housed in multiple museums throughout the Smithsonian system, all of which are cataloged separately and exist in separate databases. The head archivist thought that one of the roles that, “everyone at the Smithsonian plays is sort of interpreting the complexity of the organization itself for people. So I’m often explaining to people that we don’t have what they think we have and I’m telling them who to contact in order to find it”. He also tries to “help people in the way that any archivist in any collection does” by trying to make the collections as “easily and readily available as possible”. In a similar way to the archaeology collections manager, the archivist uses his knowledge of the collection to “try to help people find materials that they might not even know about, or related collections that may inform their research and or their (...) cultural or artistic practice”.

The ethnology collections manager at the Burke saw her primary role as, “to provide collections access (...) [and] to provide collections information”. She handles the objects, pulls them from their storage locations and returns them once they are done. She also records and documents any “cultural information that people might share with us” within the database. The notion of documenting the information that is provided by source community members is complex.

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The collections manager at NMAI described her role as “officially welcoming them into the collections storage”. The welcome process usually involves a tour and the opportunity for the community members to “smudge or say a prayer or sing or whatever they want to do to prepare themselves before we go into the storage area”. She also makes sure that her staff gives the community members an orientation. This orientation involves cautions about object handling, supporting the objects, basic preventative care. She also mentioned that, “if they prefer to handle objects without gloves they need to be aware that some of them might have been treated with pesticides in the past”. The collections staff will also remain in the storage area to assist with equipment, or do things like, “get someone a step stair ladder to see something higher or (...) pulling an object that someone may identify they would like to see closer”. Other participants also saw making people feel welcome, respected, and comfortable in the space as a part of their job. The curator at the Burke compared her job to that of a hostess.

“I guess I am just a facilitator. I think my job is to make people feel welcome and to break down barriers between them and the collections and to invite people to share our world. We come back into these collections and inhabit this incredible space, my job is to bring as many source communities as possible back here so that they can explore the opportunities to engage with collections that they want. So, I guess being a curator is really just like being a hostess in many ways”.

Multiple participants noted that museums can be uncomfortable spaces for source community members. Both the archivist and archaeology collections manager attributed this to the presence of sensitive objects.

This brings us into the discussion of what it means to care for the cultural heritage of others. There are tensions and rewards that come with that role. The archaeology collections manager brought up the fact that “sometimes people yell at me (...) I don’t like being yelled at but it comes from (...) somebody else’s place of (...) raw experience so that’s part of my job (...) to listen to that and recognize what that means and how I can (...) just be listening”. The

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NMAI archivist used the term “steward” to define this aspect of his role and it takes a slightly different form within the context of national archives because repatriation is not even an option.

“We are the stewards of other people’s cultural heritage. By in large, these are national collections, they belong to the American people but I’m very careful to not try to claim any kind of ownership over this stuff. (...) Archival materials are funny because they’re not subject to things like NAGPRA. A community can’t come and say, ‘oh [those] photographs are really important and I want it back for my community’. They can’t, that’s not something they can claim. So, what I try to do is to reassure people that we want to be responsible stewards. We want to insure the longevity of these collections and their accessibility to communities and that we will handle them, especially culturally sensitive collections, with the attention and care and respect that they deserve. And that the way that we know how to do that is through collaboration and learning. And (...) I think we all here (...) strive to be humble and to acknowledge that the (...) community visitors who come here often know a great deal more about our collections than we do and that we have a lot to learn. So, that’s a big part of our role is to be respectful stewards”.

The conservator at NMAI identified herself as a “facilitator” as well as a “steward” of the collection that “is not owned by us”. The Burke’s ethnology collections manager also described herself as both a “steward” and a “care-taker” to collections over which she had no ownership. The archaeology collections manager described the archaeology department as having a “very collaborative process” because they often hold collections in trust for tribes. She was clear that, “they’re not our collections, we’re care takers”. In this case, legally, they are not the museum’s property—this is where this example differs from the others which treated the idea of ‘ownership’ metaphorically rather than legally. Because of this relationship with tribal governments, if someone, often researchers, does request to see those objects, that agreement is negotiated with the tribes. The archaeology department will reach out to the contact person for the tribe and let them know who has requested to do research on the collection, give the proposal and ask their thoughts about it. NAGPRA also requires that all artifacts received from sites are reported to tribal members based on the location of the site. This ensures that the doors for collaboration are opened from the very beginning of the collection’s time at the institution.

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Shifting Practices

The final question posed by this study was in what ways, if any, have these practices changed the museum professional's approach to working with objects? The following will discuss the ways source communities are shifting practice.

Some of the museum professionals interviewed believed that working with source communities had truly changed the way they approach their work. The ethnology collections manager said it changed the way she interacted with objects "in a surprising way". She notes that when she began her career in collections management, she was "all about the (...) rules". Looking back, she was more concerned about the safety and preservation of the objects than anything else. But when

"you're working with communities (...) you have to sort of (...) let some of that fear go. And people want to connect with their culture, they want to connect with their communities. They want to be able to handle things that a relative or a community member made, and they should be able to, right? We are the stewards, we are the caretakers (...) and so I don't look at it as I'm the owner of these collections, that I have any right to stop people from touching things and handling things".

For her this includes open lines of communication and transparency about the consequences of handling objects. She described an experience while working at another institution where a thousand-year-old pipe was broken into four pieces because of frequent handling by the community. She noted that it is necessary to make "everyone aware that that's a possibility before, so that it's not traumatizing and upsetting". She asserted that, by being open and honest with the community, they will do the same, "and then it will be a mutually beneficial and meaningful experience because, I have found, that it becomes less about, 'tell us what you know about these objects,' and more about the relationships and (...) it's just better, it becomes better than what you initially planned that interaction to be". This idea, that the relationship takes precedent over the agenda of the museum, arises throughout the interviews. The Burke curator

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discussed her trouble documenting and collecting the knowledge that emerges from the visits because she prioritizes the relationship-

“I’m much more concerned that the visitors are getting what they want out of the experience that I don’t tend to prioritize the knowledge that we can retain from those visits even though there is a tremendous public value to documenting that knowledge. It’s a mistake, and it’s a shortcoming from my side, not to do a better job of documenting that knowledge flow. The knowledge flow often emerges so organically that trying to capture it in videos or writing down asserts our agenda beyond theirs”.

For her, working with communities did not *change* her approach to object care and curation because she worked with communities for many years before ever working with objects. Rather, she “brought communities to the objects”. To her, the prospect of being a curator without communities would be “the most boring job,” and “the day communities don’t come into collections is the day I quit”.

Similarly, the archaeology collections manager began working with tribal communities from the very beginning of her career in archaeology, so her “experience with objects in museums has always been influenced by community”. Even before she became an archaeologist, she “had a strong sense that objects are always more than the physical aspect, and that they embody (...) cultural attributes, (...) they have a life”. The NMAI archivist also began at that institution very early in his career. Working in collaboration with Native communities is the only way he has ever worked, which he described as “liberating” because he never had to unlearn anything. He described the controversy that surfaced around the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, which, among many things, acknowledges the primacy of Native people’s voice in relation to the care of their collections. What he saw in the wake of this was,

“a cohort of people from a certain generation who fought very hard for the idea of (...) the freedom to share information as widely as possible and the idea of giving a community a voice and the opportunity to restrict access to their cultural heritage was

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really an anathema to these people (...) but I'm not part of that generation and I don't come from that way of thinking and so there was no mental block for me to overcome".

The conservator also placed herself, and the mission of NMAI, within the larger landscape of museum professionals. She understands her "place in this larger social framework. And I think that kind of relinquishing authority, you know whatever authority conservators might think they have over the collection. Here it is acknowledged and understood that the authority comes from the community".

When asked if working with communities has changed the way she works with objects, she replied with a resounding yes. She believes that, "an item sitting on a shelf is an item sitting on a shelf". That object can be appreciated for its beauty but until it "is linked with its purpose, or you could say that an item is activated (...) by its people or its purposed you don't fully understand the item. And so, I feel very (...) strongly that, for conservators, the omission of that understanding is actual irresponsible treatment of the item itself". While she sees value in scientific analysis, she also sees a need to connect the object to its people in order to understand its ever-shifting purpose and role and without that, "you can't fundamentally do your job". She then provided an example of how this ethic has made its way into practice. The project she described involved eagle feather headdresses which, "due to their iconic nature," are often selected for exhibit, and each time they come into the lab, "there are lots of questions swirling around the appropriate care, the appropriate handling of those items". Most recently, two Lakota headdresses and two Northern Cheyenne headdresses were selected. She decided it was "time to actually bring people into have a comprehensive discussion about the care and treatment and the housing". The conservation lab collaborated with a professor at a Lakota tribal college with whom they already had a previous relationship. He came into the lab, travelling all the way from South Dakota, to discuss, not just conservation concerns but also curatorial, educational, and

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collections management issues. They talked specifically about the role of the headdresses in Lakota society historically and in contemporary Lakota life. He talked about the connection between the war bonnets and the eagle itself and the role of the eagle in Lakota cosmology, saying, “that connection cannot be denied. It’s critical”. He shared with them that each feather on the war bonnet represented an act or has been given to that person for something that they’ve done. The conservator described having always had “respect and reverence” for the war bonnets, but that appreciation shifted after hearing him speak about it. She gave the example:

“We have a headdress in our lab right now that has like 52 eagle feathers on it. (...) It’s an amazing, amazing item but looking at it before I’d be like, ‘wow that’s incredible’. But understanding that each one of those feathers mean something, that piece takes on an entire different level (...) that’s (...) mind blowing. It becomes like who was that person?”

She expressed frustration over the tendency to separate the “theoretical” from the “practical” in terms of object care. She notes that other museum professionals say they are looking for “practical knowledge” to inform object care such. She agrees that it is challenging to take this theoretical knowledge of the war bonnets and apply it in practice, but some of her fellows and interns found a way to do it. In the report, they chose to document the condition of each individual feather because they had learned their discrete significance. The cultural context they received from the Lakota community directly impacted their approach to how they treated and documented the war bonnets.

“The understanding that they have now as they approach the treatment and the level of treatment is critical. (...) And it’s the practical, if you want to call it that, like actual tangible execution in their cleaning of the feathers and the repair of the silk ribbons, but it’s there’s more to it than that. (...) And it’s not something you can graph or you can chart or you can easily articulate, but it is that is essential for you know, approaching an item in the most respectful way”.

This act of connecting the theoretical and the practical exemplifies how object care can occupy a blurred space that breaks down the notion of a Western vs. Native paradigm.

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What Does Success Look Like?

The final question that I asked the participants was, “what does success look like to you in this context?”. Success looks different to each participant but they are striving toward similar goals. The collections manager at NMAI saw success as the thanks she receives from “groups who have visited who say that it had been a very emotional experience and they felt very well cared for personally and that we were respectful caretakers of their objects”. One example she gave was a recent Tlingit group referring to the staff as “aunts and uncles for our objects”. The archivist saw success taking a variety of forms. For him success also meant receiving feedback that people felt they were good stewards. Success meant not making anyone mad. He saw success as, “when people come and look at, or interact with the collection somehow, whether they come here or we send stuff to them, and they have something to contribute, they have more information for us and they have more opportunity to have their voice heard”. So again, this idea of reciprocity is reinforced. He saw the revitalization of traditional art practices as one kind of success. He described his work as “gratifying” and that he felt “lucky that almost always we deal with people because they want to learn something, they want to see something beautiful, they want to know about their heritage, and they come to us from a positive place”. He qualified that the repatriation processes can be fraught, and “the potential for people to encounter restricted materials in our collections is very real, but by in large, when people come here they have a meaningful experience and it’s a privilege to be a part of that”.

The ethnology curator at the Burke also saw success as a multitude of things, and finds great pleasure in those instances of success. For her, success is embodied in the relationships between people and their objects and what can come from that relationship. She believes that,

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“Success is when the objects are valued, respected, appreciated. That the knowledge connected to those objects remains pertinent and relevant to people. When people feel empowered, confident, knowledgeable. When they are connected to the objects. When the objects help people become their best selves. Where people fill themselves with the pride and culture and knowledge connected to those objects and then that makes them the best possible supporters they can be for their own communities. So, when I think of the Pacific Islander students, watching them research those objects, and the ways that it strengthens their identity and their pride, and in turn makes them want to be the strongest advocates they can for their tremendous cultures. That, to me is the greatest gifts of those objects, and it’s the gifts that their ancestors left for them in those objects. So, it’s our job to get out of the way and let the ancestors pass on that intergenerational knowledge and confidence connected to culture to successive generations, and it’s a joy to watch it happen”.

This notion of “getting out of the way” places the control into the hands of the community. The archaeology collections manager at the Burke saw a similar kind of success, which starts with people feeling comfortable in the museum. Success for her is also “community members being a part of this institution, being fully engaged and having the power to make the decisions about their objects”. She saw this success already happening at the local level, especially in the increasing number of tribal museums in Washington state. She saw her colleagues as “so helpful, guiding me and helping me make decisions about the collections, and so the more we have that and the more we have collaborations, the more successful we will be”. She then went on to note that to truly measure success the community, “the people who are most engaged with this collection (...) and for whom the collections are the most relevant, would also need to weigh in on that question”. A sentiment with which I whole heartedly agree and see as the greatest limitation to this study.

Two participants’ first reaction was that they didn’t know, or hadn’t thought about what success looks like. Eventually, the ethnology collections manager at the Burke came to the conclusion that success could be measured by whether source community members wanted to

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continue to work with the Burke. Success would mean a continued relationship that moves beyond the professional and into a friendship. To her those relationships are essential,

“because to just (...) come in and do your job is somehow not enough. It’s good, it’s a good start but I think it has to go beyond that. Because then what’s the point? Why are you doing this work? Is it not to continue these relationships into the future? Because if (...) your point is to empower people, and (...) if you want to decolonize the museum and research and empower people to (...) write their own histories and own their collections and their culture then it has to be more than a professional relationship”.

Again, we see primacy of the relationship within this practice. In the eyes of many of these professionals the work of decolonizing and giving control back to communities cannot be done without strong, lasting relationships. The conservator at NMAI remained firm in her original answer that she didn’t know exactly what success looks like, but she knows we aren’t there yet.

While she felt that we have taken “great strides in developing (...) long term, significant partnerships”, because of the structure of the museum,

“we are still gate keepers and that is not success if you want to know my honest opinion. And I’m not sure what it’s going to take or what that actually looks like, but until we reach that, until there’s really the ability to have true equity, and, you know, that to me would be success, but I don’t really know what that looks like (...) and I’ve kind of learned to let go of that and just to really focus on what it is that we can do right now to kind of push that needle a little bit further”.

She sees inherent inequity engrained in museum professionals’ training and “in the concept that the Western ideas of museum care are dominant”. She questions the idea that they are better than other “platforms for knowledge” that she is starting to explore. But for now, she says, “I don’t really know what success is but all I know is that each day (...) I wake up in the morning and I come to work to try to move that a little bit further down the path”.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways that object based collaborations with source communities are shifting museum collections practices and the role of the museum professional. Museum scholars write about ways to decolonize the museum space (Boast, 2011; Kreps, 2003; Lonetree, 2012; Mithlo, 2004; Onicul, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Turner, 2015), but is that ethic making its way into museum collections practice? Six museum professionals, three from the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, and three from the National Museum of the American Indian, who work regularly with both objects and source communities were interviewed. Hopefully the results of this study will highlight the experiences of museum professionals who are challenging museum structures and building lasting, reciprocal relationships with their communities, and encourage others in the field to do so as well.

Conclusions

This study highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of this collaborative work while beginning to answer the question: in what ways are museums physically connecting source communities with objects in museum collections? While some of these collaborations function in formalized programs, many were built on existing relationships and expanded to take on new projects. These projects took the form of collections reviews, community curated exhibits, remembrance ceremonies, artist in residency programs, research visits, copies of photographs and motion pictures being sent to communities, long term loans and many more. Each source community has its own set of needs and circumstances, and each object has its own set of protocols and best practices for its care and treatment. It is only through listening to the wishes of the community and not resting on assumptions that we can move forward in respectful, productive collaboration.

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The theme of reciprocity and the primacy of lasting relationships was repeated throughout the interviews. This call for reciprocal relationships is echoed in museum decolonization and inclusion literature (Boast, 2011; Haakanson, 2004; Hoerig, 2010; Lonetree, 2012; Mithlo, 2004; Nordstrand, 2004; Peers & Brown, 2003). Many of the participants discussed the importance of prioritizing the relationship with the community members over the agenda of the museum. This reflects Peers and Brown's belief that, when museums work with source communities, it is essential that, "trust-building is considered integral to the process, and creating respect or healing the effects of the past is seen as being as important as co-writing labels or enhancing the database" (2003, p. 9). There were instances brought up in the interviews where the push for reciprocity and mutual benefits had to come from the community members. The museum professionals who described these moments of tension found them to be altering and important experiences.

This study revealed some of the ways museum professionals perceive their role within this practice. Some saw their role as making the collections accessible and making people feel comfortable in the museum space. Many saw their role as "steward" or "caretaker" for collections over which they held no claim of ownership. The participants illuminated some of the complexities that come with caring for someone else's cultural heritage and the privilege that comes with that position.

Some non-tribal museums in the U.S. have begun to incorporate other ways of knowing, or what is often termed 'traditional care' methodologies into collections care procedures (Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Thomas, 2004). This study highlighted some of the ways that source communities are influencing collections care and conservation. These influences ranged from storage mounts and conservation treatments, to handling requests and restricted access.

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When asked if working with communities changed the way that they interacted with objects, many answered with a resounding yes. But some noted that they came to their work with objects already operating under the notion that the voices of source communities took precedent. That the ethic of community collaboration was brought to their work, not necessarily inspired by it.

This research is rooted in, and committed to, praxis. It begins to connect theoretical approaches to decolonization and how that is implemented, or fails to be implemented, in museum collections practice. Tuck and Yang argue that decolonization requires a complete unsettling of existing settler frameworks (2012). Through this lens it is not possible to decolonize museums without dismantling what museums are and have historically been. The decolonized museum cannot be grafted into the existing museum framework. By this definition, the work described here is not truly decolonization, as it attempts to work other ways of knowing into the existing paradigm of Western museum practice, not unsettle it entirely. There are scholars who argue that tribal museums are best positioned to be sites of decolonization. They are able to give objects the cultural context and individualized care necessary and center the voices of source communities in the decision-making process (Kreps, 2003; Lonetree, 2009). But large, encyclopedic, Western museums still exist, and they still hold massive cultural collections. They may never decolonize in this entirely dismantling way. Nancy Mithlo instead argues for a deconstruction of the binary paradigms of Western vs. Native thought and the creation of a third, blurred space (2004). Collections stewardship practices can be this third space. These collaborative practices are not only happening in exhibitions. This study highlights the work of museum professionals who are operating in this blurred space. They blend traditional knowledge and Western museum practice and are often critical of the museum as an institution. They have found ways to merge the “theoretical” knowledge and traditions, the cultural context, with their

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approaches to collections care and stewardship. In the words of one participant, she tries to, “really focus on what it is that we can do right now to kind of push that needle a little bit farther” toward equity. However, the work presented here is not perfect, nor above criticism. There are a number of scholars who criticize the National Museum of the American Indian for glossing over many of the atrocities of colonialism (Lonetree, 2012; Wakeham, 2008).³ While many museums still operate firmly within a Eurocentric curatorial and custodial paradigm, as Cristina Kreps argues, “museological behavior is a cross-cultural phenomenon” (2003, p.16), meaning that the desire to pass on our cultural heritage to future generations is universal. Museums are agents of imperialism but they have also preserved objects that may otherwise have disappeared to the ravages of time and colonial destruction. Even if the impetus for collection and retention is driven by imperial paternalism, or exoticism, museums have ushered many objects through time. But, by doing so, many have been ripped from the context and the communities that give them meaning and life. Now is the time to reconnect them.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

It is the intention that this study will add to the body of collections literature and continue the conversation about the shifting roles of museum professionals as we move through this period of neocolonialism. This study attempts to provide concrete, practical examples of object based, collaborative work in the hopes that it will inspire others to build upon these examples. It shows some of the ways museum professionals are slowly incorporating collaborative, decolonizing ethics into their everyday practice. I hope that this begins to dispel the notion that this work is too difficult, too time consuming, and too costly to implement. It is all of those

³ See *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, edited by Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb for a range of critical approaches to the work being done at NMAI.

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things, but also worthwhile and necessary. This study highlights the variety of forms this work can take and museum professionals and community members alike may use the examples provided here as a framework to begin their own projects. I hope it encourages museum professionals to budget the time, energy, and funding to build lasting, meaningful, reciprocal relationships with their respective source communities.

The greatest limitation to this study is that it does not include the perspective of the source community members involved in these collaborations. By this omission, I arguably continue to center the settler narrative, in this specific case, the predominantly white museum professional's narrative. As one of my participants pointed out, we cannot define what success looks like in this context without "the people who are most engaged with this collection (...) and for whom the collections are the most relevant" weighing in on that question. I would encourage anyone attempting to continue this work to start there.

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COLLECTIONS BASED COLLABORATIONS

Appendix A: Interview Instrument

Hello, thank you very much for meeting with me today. I am asking you to participate in an interview that will be used for my thesis research which explores museum professional's experience working with source communities and objects and archival materials. This interview will take about 40 minutes. I will be recording the interview for my research purposes. I may pull quotes from this interview and if so I will include the name of the institution and your position. You may refuse to participate or to answer any question at any time without any penalty. Do you have any questions? If you have questions later you may contact me or my faculty advisor, Kris Morrissey, at any time. Do you agree to participate? Thank you, let's begin.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

RESEARCHER: Molly Winslow

INTERVIEWEE:

INSTITUTION:

DATE INTERVIEWED:

1. Could you describe some of the ways that your institution connects source communities with objects or archival materials?
2. Who initiated the relationship?
3. Could you walk me through a typical meeting or visit with _____?
 - Where do you meet
 - What do you do to prepare?
 - How much time do you typically have?
4. What is your role during the meetings/visits/etc?
5. What happens to the information that comes out during the meetings/visits?
6. Does any aspect of your personal identity influence or inform your understanding of your professional responsibilities as a INSERT TITLE?
7. Has working with communities changed the way you interact with objects or materials? How?
8. What does success look like in this context?

COLLECTIONS BASED COLLABORATIONS

Appendix B: Object Narrative Interview—Object Based

Thank you for continuing on to the second phase of this study with me. I have asked you to select an object in your collection which has been used by or for community work. I will now ask you a series of questions, this portion will take about 20 minutes. I encourage you to share any stories which come to mind while discussing these objects with me. As before, I will be recording the interview for my research purposes. I may pull quotes from this interview and you may refuse to participate or to answer any question at any time without any penalty. Do you have any questions? Great, let's get started.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION OBJECT NARRATIVE

RESEARCHER: Molly Winslow

INTERVIEWEE:

INSTITUTION:

DATE INTERVIEWED:

OBJECT NAME & CAT #:

1. Could you tell me how this object is used by source communities?
2. Does this object present any particular challenges for you as a INSERT TITLE?
3. Has the _____ community influenced how you work with this object?
4. Is this object unique in how it is treated and cared for in comparison to the rest of the collection?

COLLECTIONS BASED COLLABORATIONS

Appendix C: Object Narrative Interview—Archive Based

Thank you for continuing on to the second phase of this study with me. I have asked you to select materials from your holdings which have been used by or for community work. I will now ask you a series of questions, this portion will take about 20 minutes. I encourage you to share any stories which come to mind while discussing these materials with me. As before, I will be recording the interview for my research purposes. I may pull quotes from this interview and you may refuse to participate or to answer any question at any time without any penalty. Do you have any questions? Great, let's get started.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION OBJECT NARRATIVE

RESEARCHER: Molly Winslow

INTERVIEWEE:

INSTITUTION:

DATE INTERVIEWED:

OBJECT NAME & CAT #:

1. Could you tell me how these materials are used by source communities?
2. Do these materials present any particular challenges for you as a INSERT TITLE?
3. Has the _____ community influenced how you work with these materials?
4. Are these materials unique in how they are treated and cared for in comparison to the rest of your holdings?