

MuseumsForward

En comunidad: understanding barriers faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals as they navigate their careers

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences and barriers faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals. The study was framed by two research questions: How have Latino/a/x in museum careers navigated barriers in their career paths? How has lack of representation of Latino/a/x in museums impacted Latino/a/x professionals in their career paths? This study used a phenomenological design to identify similarities in personal experiences faced by 10 Latino/a/x museum professionals in their careers through semi-structured interviews. All participants identified financial hardships or stressors as one of their core barriers to a career in the museum field. Their explanations for how they navigated financial barriers revealed themes including, making tough choices about where to go to college, and accepting limited options for professional development. Additionally, the ability to find community in unfamiliar settings, especially those that are so deeply colonial, proved to be a hardship faced by marginalized groups in professional work settings. This feeling was shared by each of the research participants, in both the context of staff connections or experiences and how institutions interact with their visitors who might be part of marginalized communities as well. This article contributes to research on Latino/a/x in the museum field and specifically their experiences in how this historically colonial institution has impacted Latino/a/x that have chosen to pursue this career.

Keywords

Latino/a/x; museum staff; DEAI; higher education

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Introduction

Historically, the museum workforce has been predominantly White. Several studies show that museum workers range from 60-80% White (McCambridge, 2017; Sweeney, Harkins & Dressel, 2022). However, a recent study of art museum staff shows that 40% of younger staff and newer hires are people of color, mostly Latino/a/x, Asian, and those who identify as two or more races. Latino/a/x professionals face multiple barriers to museum jobs, including financial, social, and discriminatory. This article describes a phenomenological study designed to understand the experiences and barriers faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals.

Literature Review

Diversifying the Museum

Whiteness has been an inherent part of the museum institution on all fronts from creation, content, visitors, and staff. This lasting reputation carried by museums as being spaces for White individuals to access knowledge has created a hostile or hesitant feeling within communities of color toward the institution of museums. Lack of diversity in museum staffing also furthers feelings of exclusion as it has been found that in order for museums to be more inclusive, they must “become more inclusive places that welcome diverse audiences, but first they should reflect our society’s pluralism in every aspect of their operations and programs,” (Jennings & Jones-Rizzi, 2017, p. 63). This furthers the reality that representation in professional fields has an impact on how marginalized individuals interact with and experience different spaces.

The evident gap in conversations that are being had about museum professionals that identify as Latino/a/x cannot be continually overlooked as Latino/a/x individuals make up roughly 3% of museum professionals compared to 84% of White identifying staff (Cuyler, 2020). Furthermore, Latino/a/x is the fastest growing population in the U.S., highlighting the lack of proportional representation within this

professional field. White staff dominate job categories that are most closely associated with the “intellectual and educational mission” of museums (Cuyler, 2020, p.39). Evidence of this issue can be recognized in a few sources, especially the book “Latinos in Libraries, Museums, and Archives: Cultural Competence in Action! an Asset-Based Approach,” which covers a range of issues faced by the Latino/a/x community in museums. It specifically highlights the realities of Latino/a/x carving out spaces for themselves in work that has not historically been accepting of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and more specifically Latino/a/x, individuals as these challenges are being addressed specifically in the thesis problem.

Some actions that have been taken by museums to address the problem of inclusion and lack of representation of Latino/a/x in many facets of the museum world, for example, include the recent addition to the Smithsonian campus of a museum dedicated to Latino/a/x people, communities, stories, art and history called the National Museum of the American Latino. While this initiative, along with other similar projects across the country, contribute to the closing of gaps in Latino/a/x museum representation, there is still a remaining gap of diverse staffing and supporting of Latino/a/x museum professionals as they have endured an often-unwelcoming field of work.

Low pay and locality of museums make it hard for individuals to afford to do museum work. With many museums being in larger cities where cost of living can be extremely high and the general lower scale of pay, this excludes many people from marginalized communities from even being able to apply for these positions (Ennes et al., 2021).

Latino/a/x in Higher Education

Lack of Latino/a/x representation in fields and institutions of higher education can be credited to a variety of external factors (which often provide barriers for Latino/a/x communities in every facet of growth), namely themes of school-based barriers, family barriers, insufficient financial resources, and macrosystemic and exosystemic barriers (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). It has been found that these opposing forces outweigh the support available to Latino/a/x youth seeking paths to higher education. While financial and systemic factors impose a significant barrier, and sometimes are some of the largest contributing factors to barriers in higher education, a less tangible and more internal weight of the colonial standard of race exclusion and other similar contributors such as Eurocentric world powers and the overall marginalization of non-White students (Ayala & Ramirez, 2019)

contribute to imposed barriers facing Latino/a/x students whose experiences are often read as a deficit in the overarching colonial structure of higher education.

Cultural expectations placed upon young people in the Latino/a/x community impose immense pressure when decisions related to higher education and careers are brought up. For many, these conversations bring up culturally based internalized conflicts where many Latino/a/x often find themselves “caught in a cultural bind between meeting the demands of their individualistic-oriented school culture and their collectivist-oriented family culture,” (Gomez-Vilchis et al., 2013, p. 335) instilling feelings of guilt that, when combined with aforementioned financial, school-based, and macrosystemic barriers, often lead away from the pursuit of higher education among Latino/a/x individuals.

Breaking Barriers

Pursuing careers in the museum field mirrors the barriers faced by BIPOC individuals in Higher Ed. Namely, a multitude of layers including lack of representation of communities within museums and long histories of exclusion. These factors only enhance the stress and discomfort that BIPOC individuals face when emerging as professionals in the museum sphere. Another piece of literature informing this problem, “To Be Part of the Solution: Asian American Museum Staff’s Experiences in Navigating Museum Careers,” addresses the issues facing Asian American museum professionals in how they have similarly faced barriers in entering a White-centered field that has historically left very little room for BIPOC communities in the professional realm of museums. Although this work does not focus on Latino/a/x communities specifically, this allows room for my proposed research to contribute to the field while also providing a framework that could be applied in a similar way for the questions I have raised. This gap in knowledge is important in furthering information and resources for Latino/a/x professionals not only in the museum field, but in many related fields that have historically been unwelcoming of Latino/a/x.

Methodology

Study Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences and barriers faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals. This study was

framed by two research questions: 1) How have Latino/a/x in museum careers navigated barriers in their career paths? and 2) How has lack of representation of Latino/a/x in museums impacted Latinos in their career paths?

Methods

This study used a phenomenological design to identify similarities in personal experiences faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals in their careers through semi-structured interviews.

Sampling

Sampling for this research study began with identifying five Seattle based museum professionals who had been working in a museum for more than 3 years, were U.S. born, based in the greater Seattle area, and self-identified as Latino/a/x. These initial 5 participants were known to the researcher, and well connected within the field. Snowball sampling was used to identify qualified participants beyond these initial five. During their interview, each of them were asked to put the researcher in touch with someone in their professional network who met the criteria for the study. The researcher then followed up with those people, asking them to participate in the study. Sampling continued in this way until a total of 10 interviews were conducted.

Participants

A total of 10 Latino/a/x museum professionals were interviewed for this study, each of the participants meeting the criteria of self-identifying as Latino/a/x, working in the museum field for 2+ years, and currently working in the greater Seattle, Washington area.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, guided with open-ended questions. The researcher conducted interviews in-person with participants, at their museum, typically in their office or another private space in which they were free to talk openly about their professional experiences. Interviews typically lasted about 45-60 minutes and involved asking participants about both affordances and constraints experienced in their professional life (see Appendix A for the interview guide). The researcher audio recorded interviews and

used Otter AI to transcribe the recordings for analysis. To thank participants for their time and investment in the study, the researcher gave them gift cards to a local Latino/a/x owned business funded through the Master of Arts in Museology program at UW.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview data were analyzed using content analysis to identify major themes and patterns that characterized participants' lived experiences. In keeping with phenomenology research, the researcher worked to surface the dominant stories within these themes and patterns and described those in the results. A critical friend was used to provide feedback on and ask questions about the themes and patterns.

Results

1) How have Latino/a/x museum professionals navigated barriers in their career paths?

All 10 participants identified financial hardships or stressors as one of their core barriers to a career in the museum field. Their explanations for how they navigated financial barriers revealed four main themes: a) making tough choices about where to go to college; b) accepting limited options for professional development; c) resisting parental pressure for financial stability; and d) feeling unstable in the workforce.

a) Making tough choices about where to go to college

One participant who identified as Mixed-race talked about how financial barriers were a point of concern when making the earliest career decision of pursuing higher education:

"I was pretty aware and cautious of the fact that I didn't have enough family wealth to just be laissez faire about it. And I had to be like, 'Alright, I got four years now. I've got to go to a cheap school. Because if I don't, I'm probably going to regret it a lot when I'm older and I'm saddled with a ton of debt.' While I would wish that wasn't the situation for anyone, it was the right call."

(Participant 1)

Navigating this barrier of financial concern when deciding to pursue higher education meant that this participant would be limited in terms of which colleges they could attend. Potentially foregoing universities

with a larger pool of resources, which often includes on-campus museums, galleries and other related spaces, or a school with a large network and respected reputation was perceived by study participants as a disadvantage.

Additionally, there was the aspect of locating funding sources for both their undergraduate and graduate degrees, choosing to attend schools that would offer the most effective route to completing their education through scholarships or lower-cost tuition. Participants overcame this barrier by making tough decisions, but ultimately found the route of low-cost tuition or scholarships to fund school most effective and helpful for how they envisioned life after school and entering the workforce, having the opportunity to pursue higher education which is often necessary as a steppingstone for aspiring museum professionals.

An undertone of serious focus and intentionality was held by participants as the weight of financial stress would not allow room for taking higher education opportunities for granted. This meant that there was an emphasis on the educational goals of attending these institutions that participants felt others, who might not carry financial stress, would not need to focus on as much. Opportunities for social interaction were often forfeited by the majority of study participants while in college. They described not being able to experience higher education as “full-time students” but rather working out of necessity not only to gain professional experience, but to be able to make ends meet. One participant recounted their journey to higher education and how inequitable higher education experiences can be:

“But how much I missed out in college, or prior to that, because my parents just didn't have the financial means to send me out to nice places. And so I think that was just interesting to see, just to reflect on our history. I think another thing, back again to finances, being able to be a full-time student, I also worked part time and had an internship. And some of my peers were able to just be full time students. So, once again, I didn't see it at the very upper level. It was hard trying to maintain the balance and all of this, and I think it's not equitable for some students to go through that and others not.”
(Participant 7)

The necessity to focus so much time and energy into creating a sense of financial security not only had an effect on schoolwork, but also had implications on professional development.

b) Accepting limited options for professional development

Participant 5 who identified as Puerto Rican recalled how, early on in their career, the necessity of financial security or support contributed to their lack of professional development opportunities in the field, such as unpaid internships or volunteer work that is often required to get your foot in the door at museums and other adjacent institutions:

“Economical barriers, for sure. All the internships in Puerto Rico, they're not paid internships. They're all really competitive. And as well, they are far away, there were only the main cities. So you need transportation and also money, and you've got to pay for that gas, because you're not going to get any from that internship. So it was a big barrier of access just to grow professionally.” (Participant 5)

While the lack of opportunity for professional development is a significant barrier for any individual coming into the workforce, it is especially true for the museum field where volunteer and/or unpaid internship work are highly encouraged for learning skills and making connections.

Understanding the layered issue of having unpaid internships that are also located in an inaccessible place made it challenging for some participants to engage in professional development until the opportunity of graduate school was presented. For example, one participant enrolled in a museum studies graduate program, and found that opportunities for internships and similar avenues for growth were made more accessible as they were paid (partially) and accessible through public transportation as the school was located in a larger city within the continental United States, which made all the difference according to the participant:

“I knew that I have no money for grad school, and I'm going to have to take out loans. But that's just how it is, you know, that's what it has to be. And then it's like, is the job or career that I want to go towards even worth going into debt like that? And that was a really big worry for me and thinking, should I even apply? But I think I did apply because I just wasn't really happy doing what I was doing [before].” (Participant 9)

c) Resisting parental pressure for financial stability

The context of the Latino/a/x in the United States being the children of immigrants or having immigrated themselves, as was true for many of the participants, added a related pressure that often comes from the mentality that financial stability is the key to success. This can be partially understood through the experience of a participant who identified as Colombian, as they navigated this cultural pressure:

“I think the other aspect is being a kid of immigrants. Like very tangibly knowing I needed to have something to fall back on, or something more stable. Not that my parents ever really told me I had to do that. But that's just kind of perceived as, you know, make a choice, go to college, make a choice that will be financially stable for you in the long run for the American Dream, so that's where I was going.” (Participant 2)

Referencing a similar point mentioned above of being intentional and driven in decisions made when pursuing higher education, this sentiment was shared by a participant who identified the added dimension of being a child of immigrants as placing an unspoken pressure to find stability in the “American Dream.” This would guarantee a level of success that might have been hoped for by immigrant parents as it is often a shared feeling among immigrant parents who have left their homelands for what they believed the United States would have to offer. This cultural pressure was navigated by the participant through their initial choice to pursue a profession in finance, believing it would provide that stability that many children of immigrants seek. While their pursuit in the finance world did provide a good foundation and set of skills, there was a stronger pull to the world of art and education that led the participant to graduate school for museum studies and a professional career as a museum educator.

In a similar fashion, Participant 6 shared their experience in pursuing a career in museums with the same cultural pressures identified above, and described how they eventually navigated those barriers:

“Coming from an immigrant household, the thing is your parents came here and they struggled, and they want you not to struggle. And yet here you are choosing to struggle. So there's always a thought, whether it's outright from people or if it's more implied, or the little voice in your head, that's like, ‘Hey, what are you doing?’ So yeah, just having no money and knowing you’re

going to be in debt forever. Definitely. Because so many jobs are so low paid, or they're grant funded. So they're, you know, temporary. And it's not meant for, it's not set up for people who need help, or who are not coming from money already. It is frustrating. And it is scary. I will say that, yes." (Participant 6)

d) Feeling unstable in the workforce

Because the question of financial stability in the museum job market is not something that is always guaranteed, with many positions being funded by sources such as temporary grants, or the greater issue of low pay, especially for lower entry level/part-time jobs, it can be labeled as an "unstable" field of work. This was highlighted even further in conversation with Participant 4, who identified as Mexican, who shared:

"And then I think the other thing I said earlier, which is just like it's not a hugely lucrative profession, if that's important to you. That is a barrier for folks living in a place like Seattle, where cost of living can be a barrier, possibly combined with low wages." (Participant 4)

Combined factors of financial stress and employee burnout were common among study participants, as is the case for many museum professionals, especially those who identify as BIPOC. Not only did low wages affect the capacity of participants to do their work effectively, past the financial hardships that come with even entering this field of work, but participants described a lack of funding available to them to follow through on work that has been promised by an institution, as articulated by Participant 8 who identified as Puerto Rican:

"I would say the biggest barrier to be honest, it's just pay. You get burned out, you are underpaid. Then you see so much money and well, yet, you only get a very, very, very, very, very tiny slice of the pie. And not only for your compensation but also sometimes for even our resources. You know, we have millions of dollars for x, y, & z but not \$1,000 for, you know, extra money to do the work that supposedly the museum is committed to doing. I would say it's the same across you know, not pointing any fingers at this one or that one, but I think it's the same across museums period." (Participant 8)

The interconnectedness of financial worry, as expressed by the interviewed Latino/a/x museum professionals and has been touched on above, provides ample insight into how different phases of an individual's career path is structured around the barrier of severe lack of resources available to individuals and institutions. Participants shared how they navigated the financial barriers they encountered to the best of their ability, some not having a clear path through the economic hardship, but continued to move forward any way they could, making sacrifices, compromises, and peace with the current reality of the museum field and its financial priorities/capabilities.

2) How has the lack of representation of Latino/ax professionals in museums impacted Latino/a/x in their career paths?

The ability to find community in unfamiliar settings, especially those that are so deeply colonial, proves to be a hardship faced by marginalized groups in professional work settings. This feeling was shared by each of the research participants, in both the context of staff connections or experiences and how institutions interact with their visitors who might be part of marginalized communities as well, with three shared themes emerging from these conversations: a) feeling 'othered' within the institution, b) working to find community across the museum, c) bridging community and the museum through inclusion efforts.

a) Feeling 'othered' within the institution

As efforts for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within the museum field have grown widely over the last ten years, it is important to understand the reality that this work is often left to the BIPOC staff of a given institution. This leads to compounded feelings of grief where, according to participants, they have felt "othered" from their White coworkers who do not always fulfill their commitments to DEI initiatives:

"When certain organizations talk about their goals and how they're achieving those goals, a part of me is like, 'You're not doing that. Like, I don't feel like we're doing any of that.'" I guess mainly when it comes to DEI is both when I feel the most visible and the most invisible. I think also, like museum demographics, not so much now, but in other organizations I have felt like I'm the 'other' person that comes from a different culture that

isn't like your typical White American that grew up here." (Participant 7)

Participants felt that the museums in which they worked were not able to recognize the thin line between inclusivity and othering. Being unable to show up to work as their full self, participants shared how this adds to the complex realities of working in a field that has historically utilized extractive practices as a foundation for the field. Acknowledging the bittersweet realities of representation and tokenization was a significant part of the hope for greater diversity in both staff and visitor demographics, as was shared by Participant 3 who identified as being of Mexican descent:

"I do acknowledge that it's an honor. But also at the same time, it's a bit embarrassing to be the first. And not because I'm embarrassed of that, but it just has a history to be the first of Mexican descent to be a museum director." (Participant 3)

The realities of lack of representation shared above provides a foundational understanding of the thin line between celebrating diversity and representation and exploiting or tokenizing Latinos in professional settings. Participants explained that being the "first" in a position or field as a person of color introduces pressures to be an "extraordinary" version of oneself. Here identity becomes the most significant achievement, creating intense pressure and tokenization. This idea of reductive tokenization that institutions tend to (intentionally or otherwise) place upon BIPOC professionals was spoken about by Participant 6:

"Suddenly, that [identity] becomes very important to them being able to do their job and like, that's how they're spoken about. It's like, 'Oh, you're a person who does this.' It's not like you're just the person in the business, right? You're not just the collections manager here. You're the Hispanic collections manager, you're the Latina collections manager, you know, whatever. And these things are important. But it would be nice to get away from that. But we're not in a world where you can get away from that." (Participant 6)

Being placed in a position where it is felt that individuals within the institution are in a way asking their BIPOC staff to perform as a demonstration of diversity felt extremely hurtful to participants, bringing forth the importance of finding connections across one's

institution and other institutions in their network. This search for community and connections was described as a natural instinct among Latino/a/x identifying individuals whose shared experiences helped to empower each other through cultural contexts and understandings of how “othering” is harmful.

b) Working to connect with community across the museum

Balancing feelings of frustration and gratitude, as it was expressed by participants across their interviews, highlighted how fulfilling it is to be a source of representation for current and future professionals and museum visitors while also recognizing how few and far between Latino/a/x representation is in the museum field. An example of this bittersweet reality was shared by Participant 8 who identified as Puerto Rican, as they experienced their first joy of representation through an authority figure of similar cultural descent:

“My boss was Puerto Rican, and she was just like, so unapologetically herself, and unapologetically Puerto Rican. And she really is the one that taught me that there is this space at the table for you. And, you know, she really taught me to fight for myself, be who I am, and just be authentic. And that's really where my mind started to shift. And to this day, we still chat, and she really, really changed my perception about myself and my career. I feel super lucky that the world just worked out for her to be my boss. What are the odds, you know? I had never seen a Puerto Rican woman outside of Puerto Rico have a higher position like that, you know? Those are really big deals.” (Participant 8)

Exemplifying the duality of feeling angry or undervalued in traditionally White, colonial spaces versus feeling hopeful and ready to keep growing diversity in the field and institutions holistically was, in so many words, what each of the participants shared. Building community with professionals in the museum field who identify as Latino/a/x, especially in a city with a relatively small museum network, can begin to not only create a greater sense of comfort for Latino/a/x in the field, but can begin to bring more Latino/a/x into the profession through bridging connections and creating spaces for collaboration:

“So, I think that hopefully being able to connect with others...and I think I really liked this idea of getting all these Latino museum professionals together. I really

want that to happen. Yeah, so, you know, baby steps towards letting go of this anxiety that I've been feeling for a while." (Participant 10)

Bringing together Latino/a/x museum professionals across institutions was an idea shared by all participants as they each believed that this would foster greater wellbeing for Latino/a/x in the field. Participant 10 shared that bringing Latino/a/x museum professionals across institutions together could also provide community for individuals who might be the only Latino/a/x identifying staff in a given department or museum:

"It's just sharing stories and learning about each other. Sharing those nice experiences and remembering the profound resilience of Mexican [and Latinx] people. Our ability to find joy anywhere." (Participant 1)

c) Bridging community and the museum through inclusion efforts

Most participants, when talking about their personal career paths, made a point to include how community outside the professional realm fit into their own missions, both as part of a greater institution and as members of community themselves, hoping to be collaborative and inclusive with those who will ultimately be experiencing what the institution presents:

"I think I would feel more supported if there was the ability to carry out the work in a way that does support those communities, does create that feedback loop of people being interested in this work or be inspired by this work either to go, maybe not even work in museums, but something adjacent? I think that is like where support starts, making all of our programs and exhibits accessible to both. And I think we do it in different ways." (Participant 4)

A similar passion was shared by this Colombian museum educator, who named specifically the importance of language access and showed how this barrier is interconnected with the aforementioned barrier of lack of financial resources for programming and staffing to meet accessibility and inclusion goals:

"So the kind of thing that I want to actually go towards isn't necessarily going upwards. It's just kind of like

going sideways and doing something that's really focused on language access, and really focused on how do we make everything more accessible, not just from Spanish, but from all kinds of different ways. And there's so many barriers around the budget and constraints of like, well, this is what we've got."
(Participant 2)

Concerns were shared on the staffing front, wondering how accessibility and inclusion issues can be addressed with such a deficit in resources. Another aspect of this community driven and oriented work was shared between Latino/a/x museum professionals:

"I've led workshops in Spanish, or I've translated lesson plans, or flyers, you know, and, but I'm just one person. And so the work is there. And I wish we could expand it, but expanding it means more resources. And it also means commitment from the museum. That is not just because I am Latina. There needs to be an actual commitment from the higher ups or whatever you want to call it, that we're translating labels that weren't translated. When our website says that we're translating all these things, it should be not just in Spanish, but in other languages as well." (Participant 8)

The urge to stretch oneself incredibly thin in order to meet these goals for the benefit of community members, at the cost of personal exhaustion and burnout, has had a significant impact on not only the present Latino/a/x museum professional community, but could pose a problem for individuals as they begin their pursuit of this journey:

"I'm at the front door [of the museum]. So people see me as soon as they walk in. And I think it makes me feel really good when guests come up to me, and like, ask me if I speak Spanish, or just start talking to me in Spanish. Because it feels very validating, I think, because they see me and they're like, 'Oh, okay, you know, she's one of us.'" And, like asking me for help, or even if they just say like, 'Good morning,' in Spanish, you know, it's just very nice, I think. And even talking to people in the galleries in Spanish, where they just come up and ask me a question about the art or about the restroom."
(Participant 9)

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences and barriers faced by Latino/a/x museum professionals, and how they navigated through their experiences. Findings that emerged from interviews with participants uncovered how barriers to Latino/a/x museum professionals manifested in different ways, but all seemed to follow similar themes that were shared across the experiences of each participant.

Financial barriers to higher education that were highlighted by participants were, in part, consistent with a study that identified the biggest barriers to higher education faced by Latino/a/x youth as they transition out of high school (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). The findings of this study named “not enough money” and “having a job or working outside of school” as two major barriers that would deter Latinx youth (p. 32-33). These financial barriers were similarly highlighted by participants in this study as they shared their journeys from high school into higher education, and described making tough choices about where to go to college, and resisting parental pressure for financial stability. Participants shared that familial support in accessing higher education was minimal or non-existent, meaning that they would not be able to lean on family for financial support, and emphasized the necessity of working through college, not just for professional development.

Additionally, while financial barriers to higher education were relevant for all participants, the reality that the museum profession is not a lucrative one is not one that the participants of this study had the luxury to overlook. Pursuing a field that often relies on unstable streams of income or revenue can translate to a lack of job security that is not equitable for all individuals who chose to go into the field (Rende, et al., 2021), namely Latino/a/x museum professionals who experience cultural pressures to pursue a profession that will bring financial stability. This was true for participants as they shared their familial expectations and perceptions of what is expected of them in the realm of achieving this “American Dream” that immigrant families aspire to (Gomez-Vilchis et al., 2013), coming into the professional world for not only themselves, but for their families too.

Another significant barrier for Latino/a/x museum professionals as they moved into their careers was how lack of representation affected them, and has become a significant piece of what the community has begun to work toward both through staff connections and community connections within and across institutions. This sentiment is confirmed through the reality that within art museums, only 3% of workers identify as Latino/a/xx (Cuyler, 2020) making it difficult to connect with

such small percentages of community members, also shared by participants as they shared being one of very few Latino/a/x within their museums, and a few participants being the only Latino/a/x identifying staff within their institution. Bridging these gaps in diversity walks a thin line with perpetuating extractive practices. This was felt by participants who, while the institution at large works on creating “a more diverse workforce,” have felt forced into carrying the burden of spearheading those DEI initiatives (Jennings & Jones-Rizzi, 2017) that are not always followed through on by the majority White staff and leadership.

Limitations

This study was conducted with a small sample of Latino/a/x museum professionals in the Seattle-area which cannot encompass the reality of every Latino/a/x identifying museum professional in the area as those who did participate were individuals that were part of a network that I had established, and could have gone differently if I reached out to individuals that I had no connection to in the field. Additionally, because the sample was limited to Seattle-area Latino/a/x museum professionals, this study does not speak to the experiences of Latino/a/x museum professionals across the United States or even globally. Factors such as place and culture can greatly affect experiences of individuals in the museum field, which was not represented outside of the Seattle-area due to the set parameters of the study.

Implications

This research study contributes to research on Latino/a/x in the museum field and specifically their experiences in how this historically colonial institution has impacted Latino/a/x who have chosen to pursue this career. Opportunities for further research around this topic could look like sampling from a broader scope of Latino/a/x museum professionals from across the United States, as this study focused on Seattle based museum professionals. It would also be impactful to explore a more specific type of museum in which Latino/a/x professionals work, and how that impacts their experiences, possibly comparing professionals who work in more culturally driven institutions versus natural history or science focused museums.

As representation across the museum field grows for Latino/a/x museum professionals, it is imperative that institutions better

recognize the importance and value of this subset of museum workers. Investing in Latino/a/x staff beyond the often performative tokenization of hiring very few Latino/a/x and saddling them and other BIPOC professionals with DEI work and other emotionally charged labor would require institutions to see into the heart of the work that can/is done by Latino/a/x museum professionals, hiring more Latino/a/x in leadership roles and trusting that they know what is best for engaging and creating places for community and learning.

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Interview Guide

Introduction/Getting started: Please introduce yourself with your

- o Name
- o Pronouns
- o Age
- o Where you are calling from (if applicable)
- o How you ethnically and racially identify
- o Your job title

The Path:

- o Starting from high school, describe your path from high school student to your current job.
- o College
 - § Degree(s)/program(s)
 - § Internships
 - § Assistantships
- o Outside of school opportunities
 - § Internships
 - § Volunteer
 - § Fellowships
- o Key people
 - § Mentors/teachers
 - § Coworkers/classmates
- o Previous museum jobs
- o Current position

Barriers and Supports:

Barriers:

- o What would you say were the barriers deterring you from working at museums as an emerging professional?

- o How did you respond to them?
- o Did you anticipate them?
- o Are there any barriers you are currently facing in moving up or investing in professional development at work? (Promotion, raises, more responsibilities, etc.)

Support:

- o What were pivotal moments in which you experienced support in pursuing your job (in the museum)?
- o By what or who?
 - § Mentors
 - § Museum programs
 - § Internships, volunteering, etc.
 - § Degree(s)
- o How did those moments or catalysts contribute to your pursuit? To continue to work?

Being Latino/a/x in the Museum:

- o Do you think the barriers and supports that you experienced are because of your identity as Latino/a/x? Describe why or why not.
- o What are moments at work in which you feel your identity as a Latino/a/x is most visible? Most invisible?
- o Which ones were empowering because you are Latino/a/x?
- o Which ones harmed you?
- o What are similarities you notice between your path into your job compared to your non-Latino/a/x coworkers? Differences?

Reflection:

- o What is something you would have done differently?
- o What is a career choice that you are most proud of?
- o What is one thing you would like to see change about how museums invest in their Latino/a/x staff? In emerging professionals?

- o How are you involved in uplifting emerging Latino/a/x museum professionals?
- o Or How could you imagine yourself uplifting emerging Latino/a/x museum professionals?
- o What advice would you give to emerging museum professionals who also identify as Latino/a/x?
- o Since we are at the end of this interview, I would like you to take a few minutes to reflect on the questions I've asked and the responses you have shared. Is there anything more you would like to say?
- o What is something you will carry with you from this interview into your own work?
- § Something you will continue to do? Something different?
- o What is something that has been on your mind recently regarding the Latino/a/x identity and/or community and the role of museums?

Follow-up:

- o Once the research article is complete, would you like me to send it to you?