

MuseumsForward

Repatriating Knowledge: Community engagement through museum collections

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Abstract

Museums have been stewards of cultural knowledge since their conception. However, oftentimes the knowledge they have retained is knowledge that has been lost by communities impacted by colonization. Museums are beginning to think critically about how they can engage source communities more beneficially, and better serve their strong request of reclaiming their traditional knowledge. One of those means is through utilizing heritage materials found in museum collections. Through the analysis of two case studies involving the Sugpiaq community of Kodiak, Alaska, the Alutiiq Museum, and the Burke Museum, this research argues the positive impact museum can impart on source communities searching to revitalize traditional heritage knowledge back into a living context.

Keywords

Community Engagement; Colonization; Collections; Heritage Materials; Alaska Native

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Introduction

Knowledge has been passed down through generations through the hands of one's community, whether that be through writing, music, dance, artwork, or oral stories through people's interactions and shared everyday togetherness. Often when we discuss the pursuit of knowledge, we think of institutions developed with the purpose of perpetuating and preserving it, such as universities or museums. Although museums are revered as places of wonder and imagination, museums have also been great disruptors in disseminating knowledge and perpetrators of harmful narratives (Baudino, 2012). The narratives, products of colonialism and conquest, includes curating and exhibiting a false or incomplete history and framing Indigenous culture as primitive or stuck in the past (Ibid.). It also consists of the dissonance of collecting and preserving material culture of Indigenous communities into repositories. Museums, often far removed from the originating tribal communities, were created by Euro-American anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, and amateur collectors fueled by the belief that these materials needed "saving" (O'Neal, 2015).

In contrast, tribal nations were stripped of their access to land, resources, language, and livelihood through the brutality of boarding schools and systemic genocide (Woolford, 2015). The rippling effects of colonialism are still felt through the generations of tribal descendants grieving the loss of homeland, relatives, and traditional ways of life, compounded by the loss of access to heritage materials being kept inside museum storage and behind glass (Lonetree, 2012; Onciul, B., 2015). Despite the impacts of colonization, tribal communities have carried forward their cultures and traditions through their efforts to revitalize language, song, dance, art, and food traditions. However, the results of the disrupted accessibility to collections have made the process of reintegrating and recreating "sleeping" knowledge back into practice challenging (Morgan, 2018). Led by Indigenous activists and cultural bearers, direct interrogation of museological collection practices has demonstrated that tribal members have been kept from accessing and learning from their communities' materials. Historian and archivist Jennifer R. O'Neal (2015) clearly describes the desired relationship between collection caretakers and source communities in her article "*The Right to Know: Decolonizing Native American Archives*" where she suggests an evolution in the archival field that promotes stewardship:

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.

O'Neal's request in shifting museum and source community relationships underlines the need for continual growth where engagement intersects with decolonization and the repatriation of heritage knowledge. Decolonization, as defined by Susan A. Miller, is a "process designed to shed and recover from the ill effects of colonization" (Miller, 2008, p. 14). As museums move forward towards centering decolonial practices in their institutions, the remaining question is what does stewardship look like? The purpose of this research study is to understand the impact on source communities who participate in museum projects developed using collection materials as the means of returning heritage knowledge. This research is governed utilizing four research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of community members who have learned from museum collections?
2. How have these collections impacted community knowledge?
3. What are the perceptions and experiences of museum staff who have collaborated with communities?
4. In what ways have museums shifted practice as a result of these collaborations?

Literature Review

Collection Policies

Today's standards of care within museums have been imposed by Western European understanding of handling and preservation in regard to exhibition, preservation, and storage methodology. The holding of these objects in long periods of isolation conflict with the holistic views held by communities who created them (Callison, 2014; Mithlo, 2004). Moira Simpson explores this conflict in *Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education*. Simpson recognizes how preservation and interpretation are the core functions of museum practice but is neglectful in engaging with source communities that are actively preserving their culture by applying knowledge into a living context. She elaborates on this by enunciating how the retention of critical ceremonial materials within static places of storage conflicts with their intent as intergenerational knowledge transmitters within Indigenous communities that preserve and renew the intangible aspects of heritage (Simpson, 2009).

Access

Robin Boast elaborates in *Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited*: “[t]he museum, as a site of accumulation, as a gatekeeper of authority and expert accounts, as the ultimate caretaker of the object, as the ultimate arbiter of the identity of the object, as its documenter and even as the educator, has to be completely redrafted” (Boast, 2011, p. 67). Boast’s demands for the reconsideration of access policies elucidates the ways museums inhibit the reclamation of knowledge from communities determined to practice lost traditional culture. Camille Callison discusses in *Indigenous Peoples’ New Canoe* how cooperative and respectful practices that provide Indigenous communities with access to their material heritage can help breathe life back into the people. “In doing so, they become a very important part of the reclamation of Indigenous cultures, languages, art, and history, preserving this information in our communities for continued use and enjoyment while facilitating the intergenerational transfer of knowledge” (Callison, 2014, p. 136).

Colonialism

In *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, Amy Lonetree articulates that the root of the problem museums have is in understanding the distrust and frustration towards them in how they refuse to name their relationship to colonialism and its devastating consequences specifically. Lonetree underlines the neglected work of “decolonizing” museums assisting their communities in addressing the “legacies of unresolved historical grief” through their refusal to name their relationship to colonialism (Lonetree, 2012, p. 5). Susan A. Miller echoes Lonetree in *Native America Writes Back: The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography*, wherein their definition of decolonization, specify how the term colonialism openly acknowledges how the planting of colonies displaced the homelands of other people. Miller explains in their article that in order to serve the community’s needs, collaborative projects must specify the narrative of past events and engage with the recovery of lapsed Indigenous knowledge.

Collaboration

Robin Boast’s article *Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited* discusses the importance of collaborative engagement

while critically examining the inequitable approaches that museums have taken. They elaborate on the term “contact zone” (defined by Mary Louise Pratt in *The Arts of the Contact Zone*) as “spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” and “where a dominant culture would provide for a ‘negotiated’ space for certain kinds of cultural exchange, negotiations, and transactions” (Boast, 2011, p. 57). Boast describes collaborative projects designed by museums as instances of contact zones, and as authoritative figures, hold an unbalanced amount of power. They exemplify that this results in the invited community party feeling extracted from without feeling any sense of reciprocity or benefit. Boast follows up this warning with an urge for museums to become places of shared authority and resources for the enrichment and service of source communities (Ibid.).

Methodology

Study Design

This study relied on a qualitative research design using a case study approach. Two projects, the Pinguat project and the Angyaaq project, both of which were situated within the Sugpiaq community, served as cases. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with questions tailored for museum professionals or participating community members.

Participants

Criteria for participation in the study were individuals at least 18 years old, individuals who had involvement in either the Pinguat project or Angyaaq project, and those willing to participate in a 30 – 60-minute interview. For the Pinguat project, two community member participants were interviewed, as well as Executive Director April Counciller and Chief Curator Amy Steffian of the Alutiiq Museum. For the Angyaaq project, two community member participants were interviewed, as well as Curator of Native American Anthropology Sven Haakanson Jr. of the Burke Museum. In this research, each community member will be referred to anonymously and as CM1 through 4. Museum professionals will be referred to by their last name.

Data Collection

This research study used semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Before starting the interview process, the researcher introduced themselves and the research, informed them that the interviews were to be recorded solely for the purpose of notetaking, and would not be viewed by others. In addition to the interviews, the researcher analyzed internal documents about the Pinguat project provided by the Alutiiq Museum.

Positionality

It is imperative to recognize the researcher's positionality as a non-Indigenous individual researching and engaging with Indigenous community. They will never make any claims to be an expert on Indigenous life and experiences as these are experiences that they will never have. What they do hope for is to allow their intersecting identity as a mixed-race queer diasporic Filipino speak from a place that recognizes how systemic oppression, colonialism, and white supremacy have impacted how we have been able to connect to our history, culture, and communities. This research centers on the Indigenous experience as they are the original stewards of the lands we live in and conduct our research on, were the first communities to be affected by displacement, and have been communities advocating unendingly for themselves and their rights.

Sugpiaq Community

Ancestral Sugpiaq inhabitants have occupied their lands for over 7,000 years (Fitzhugh, 2003) on a hunting and voyaging culture that thrived on rich maritime resources. Russian conquest began in the late 1700s, and the Sugpiaq community was faced with a plethora of tragedies that they have survived through, including Russian slavery, forced labor, and starvation (Knecht, Haakanson, & Dickson, 2002), epidemics (Luehrmann, 2008), and English only American government schools that caused the near extinction of the language (Hegna, 2003; Woolford, 2015). Due to two large suppressive forces – Russian and American – the Sugpiaq community has been left to reconcile with a sense of lacking knowledge and authorship of who they are.

Traditionally, the Indigenous community self-identified themselves as Sugpiaq ("real person"). When the Russians first arrived on Kodiak Island, they used the term Aleut ("coastal dweller") first introduced by Russian traders during colonization to refer to any Indigenous person

they met throughout the Aleutian Islands, Alaskan Peninsula, and Kodiak Archipelago, despite cultural and linguistic differences (DeHass, 2012; Alutiiq Museum, n.d.). Alutiiq is the Sugpiaq pronunciation of the Russian-introduced word in the Alutiiq language. Gaining popularity in the 1980s, it still remains a popular self-designator for the Indigenous population on Kodiak, however, there is currently a popular resurgence of the use of Sugpiaq. Throughout this study, the researcher utilizes the term Sugpiaq to refer to the Indigenous population of Kodiak and the word Alutiiq when referring to their language. Upon working with and learning from many Sugpiaq participants, it is essential to clarify that they may use any self-identifier upon referring to themselves, and their choice in doing so is respected and honored.

Angyaaq Project

Angyaat (plural) were open skin boats utilized along the Alaskan coast from Kodiak Island to Nome (Haakanson, Personal Communication). They were used for transportation, hunting, and warfare and were a part of Sugpiat daily life. After Russian contact, traders destroyed all angyaat as a means of inhibiting Sugpiaq from their livelihood and from escape (Black, 1992; Haakanson, Personal Communication). As a result, little to no knowledge remained of these boats except remnants in the archeological record and small angyaaq models, which are scattered throughout museum collections across the globe. Sven Haakanson began the process of learning the history of angyaat through examining the Angyaaq models he could find, reverse engineering through sketches and photographs, and recreating his own models. In the summer of 2014, Haakanson traveled to Cape Alitak, Alaska, for the annual Kids Culture Camp, a weeklong camp in which Sugpiaq youth come to learn about traditional cooking, dancing, hunting, and crafting. He worked with Sugpiaq youth to assemble fourteen model angyaat. In the spring of 2015, Haakanson, along with Burke staff, students, and anyone willing to volunteer their time, cut and assembled the frame of the first full-sized 25-foot angyaaq since their eradication. That summer, Haakanson returned to the Cape Alitak Kids Culture Camp, and in collaboration with Sugpiaq community members, taught what he was able to ascertain through museum collections. In the Summer of 2015, the angyaaq's wooden frame was assembled, and in 2016 the skin stitch hide was attached, culminating in a 15-foot Angyaaq that now resides in the village of Akhiok.

As an undergraduate student of Haakanson at the University of Washington, the researcher first became acquainted with the Angyaaq

project in early 2015. They assisted with the assembly of the first angyaaq but was invited to continue on with the project at the Cape Alitak Kids Culture Camp. Here, they aided in the construction of the second angyaaq, but also participated in all camp activities, particularly in engaging Sugpiaq youth with the Angyaaq project. The researcher has been an annually returning participant of this Culture Camp since 2015.

Pinguat Project

Pinguat is the Alutiiq word for beads. Upon becoming the Executive Director of the Alutiiq Museum, April Counciller was drawn to traditional Sugpiaq beadwork. She was interested in revitalizing the art of traditional beaded dance regalia, which includes beaded belts, cuffs, and a nacaq (headdress). In order to meet the needs of revitalizing beaded dance regalia, Counciller selected a regalia set that was collected from Kodiak in 1872 from Alphonse Pinart. Pinart, a French anthropologist who traveled throughout the Kodiak region, documented language, traditions, and acquired over 100 Sugpiaq heritage materials which eventually were collected by the Château-Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer, France (Alutiiq Museum, Personal Communication). The Alutiiq Museum had begun comprehensive relationship building with the Château-Musée in order to connect with the objects in their care and acquire objects on loan to be a part of their exhibits. In July of 2018, six heritage materials were requested for a five-year loan: two wooden masks and the four-piece beaded dance regalia, the only known complete set of its kind (Alutiiq Museum, Personal Communication). In order to develop an understanding of Sugpiaq beading traditions, the Alutiiq Museum developed a project, Pinguat—Beaders, for

Sugpiaq beadworkers to connect with the cultural knowledge that resides inside the regalia, as well as reproduce a new set based on the regalia. The project began with a call for artists to apply, from which they selected 15 participants. Over the course of a week, the participants studied, photographed, and recreated components of a new regalia set and pieces meant for educational purposes.

Findings

Interview excerpts in this research have been smoothed out for readability, including omitting moments of pauses, stutters, “ums,” and

consecutive “like.” These omissions were not intended to remove data but only to accommodate for the “bumps” of natural conversation.

Research Question One

Kinship

Three out of the four community member interviewees mentioned the appreciation of working and learning alongside fellow members of their community. Based on their responses, there was significance in the communal environment that added to the learning and facilitation process. When asked what their favorite aspect of working on the angyaaq revitalization project was, CM4’s response, “I think it’s the company. Being together” was similar to CM1 and CM2 of the pinguat project. CM2 of the pinguat project reflected on how the feeling of having a facilitated experience where everyone was working on the beaded regalia “wasn’t just a beading circle” and “we were all investigating the same piece of art from our ancestors. And that was way bigger than just getting together and doing our own projects. It was really, really, impactful in that way. The building of community.” CM1 specifically remarked on the significance of working and learning collaboratively alongside fellow Indigenous women.

It was really neat to be able to work with a group of women on a project like this, and sit, and laugh, and talk, and share stories, and learn together. I think that more important than actually recreating the headdress, and recreating and creating the document behind the headdress was the act of bringing us together in that it’s such a culturally relevant thing to bring a bunch of women together in a group and put a project in front of us and just like let us just at it

The remark “culturally relevant” by CM1 emphasizes the needs of traditional ways of kinship and the need for spaces for individuals with intersecting identities and experiences. The emotions and sensations of sitting around the table and focusing on learning about a singular heritage material felt deeper compared with working separately from one another.

Time

Although all participants had a significant appreciation for the opportunity to learn and participate in the two projects, two of the participants expressed the desire for more time to learn and apply the knowledge. CM2 specifically voiced the frustration that because there was only a week to work on the project, roles were assigned to specific people. "Some people learned how to make a bracelet, and some people learned how to work on a headdress, and some people learned how to do the other project. But nobody learned all those things. And so more rotation and diversity of skill development for each participant would have been really nice." Hearing these remarks, it can be seen how imperative investing time into these projects is. It can be frustrating for participants when projects are constrained to a limited timeframe, and they feel they don't have enough time to fully be allowed to learn, explore, and theorize about the project they have been invited to participate and contribute.

Access to Collections

CM2 identified their frustration of having regular access to heritage materials in museums. "There's this gatekeeping that museum professionals feel. Like they have a responsibility to protect a thing. But where does that stop? Because our community members also have a responsibility to protect that thing." This is a clear and poignant statement that underlines the dissatisfaction towards museums that override the responsibility of allowing source communities to participate in the caretaking of their own heritage materials with their own desire to protect. CM3 expressed similar frustration with the physical barriers of storage, distance, and cost as challenging obstacles to navigate. CM3 recognizes that museums have an abundance of heritage materials that they care for and the uncertainty of how much information gets shared about those materials: "I'm not sure if they share a lot of the knowledge of what the artifacts are and where they were found." CM3 further elaborated on the difficulties of navigating the barriers of access: "If there is a way that we can get them online and have that knowledge available that way, that would be a big help to the people who try to, like, make these tools, masks, utensils, bowls, forks, spoons, stuff like that, and the material that they used would be beneficial."

Handling Collections

In conjunction with a desire to spend more time learning and processing the heritage materials, participants made a note of their desire to handle collection objects physically. CM2's response "The least rewarding part, I think, was we couldn't touch anything. We still couldn't touch it. But we had to count all the beads. Do you know how hard it is to count beads you can't touch? So, we had to just, like, get really close and not breathe on it and not touch it, like, determine how many beads were in a section and how many sections were in a row." CM2's experience highlights how the inability to handle their heritage materials becomes a barrier to returning traditional knowledge. CM2 further articulated this when explaining how they prefer not to see their own materials in museums: "If I dance it, it gets in pictures, and people experience it, and they see how it moves. But in a museum, no one's allowed to touch it. It sits behind glass. It sits in a protected area. And I like my things to be worn and used and then take up that spirit and share that spirit with other people." Their specific comment on how individuals are restricted from interacting physically with heritage materials, and the preference for the heritage material's spirit to be with other people, underlines the frustration felt by those who see the museum collection space as a barrier.

Research Question Two

Sparking More Questions

The experience became a catalyst to even more questions. Three out of the four participants made specific remarks about how working on their respective projects surfaced new ideas and questions. One of the participants, CM4, reflected on what they learned about voyaging boats throughout their life in contrast to their expectations of voyaging within the Sugpiaq community. When asked the question during the interview what working on the Angyaaq project made them think of, they told the story of their experience throughout high school in having to learn about other voyaging communities, such as their research papers on the Vikings or on Columbus. CM4 then began organically exploring the past histories of their community.

After learning about the Angyaaq, is our relation much sooner than the land bridge. Because, what Pinart was also talking about in his story was from the old, the elder, was that just before the Russians came, the medicine people told them never to come back after

they'd left. Never to come back. So, my thinking was, where did they go? Where was their next journey going to take them? We knew about Peru. We knew about Hawaii. Possibly Australia. Further west.

The reflection underlines how this experience allowed them to think critically about what they have been told throughout their life about voyaging abilities of other communities, but by participating and learning from collection materials, archives, storytelling, and the rebuilding of the Angyaaq, they were able to reconsider this narrative and rethink the accomplishments of the Sugpiaq people.

CM2 discussed how, in conjunction with thinking about the specific process of making the headdress, examining the nacaq kindled a plethora of questions about its own history and how it came to be. "How did they get all these beads? Why aren't there more headdresses in the world? Like there are only a few headdresses in the world that are made by Alutiiq people...I just I really just felt like it made me ask more questions than answered questions." For CM1, they voiced their frustrations of feeling that the expectations they had after leaving the Pinguat project were not precisely met. For them, they anticipated entering the project would leave them knowing strictly how traditional nacaq headdresses were previously made. However, the difficulty of the craftsmanship and the limited time they had to work with left them looking for more. "I actually had to leave the class and then spend a year tearing apart a headdress to try and figure out how they made it that way. I had thought that I would come out of that class and be like, now I know how to make this headdress, but I didn't." This experience was a result of the understanding that they are still working with "awakening" knowledge, in that no one holds the single answer into how these were made. This is still in the process of discovery. CM1 made sure to emphasize that this is no fault of anyone's, and the responsibility to learn and teach is not one a single person can carry. CM1 expressed an understanding that this learning process is fraught with limitations given that their community is still in the process of learning more about themselves and their traditional heritage.

Recognizing the limitations that are here...with our culture, so much of it is asleep, that like understanding it's okay that there's limitations around those who are teaching. I know that for myself because I'm like a baby in this world. But I think that I sometimes expect too much of my teachers not understanding that they are doing exactly what I tell people to do, which is when you

learn it, teach it so it doesn't go away. Let's keep this going instead of waiting until they're masters and know everything. It will just go away at that point.

CM1's experience articulates that the responsibility of learning, engaging, and carrying heritage knowledge is a communal effort that cannot be reliant on one singular person or one singular instance. Additionally, recognizing that this process will take time and necessitate continual support and engagement. "What it comes down to is that we're also learning, we're reclaiming this ground, and I don't really believe that there is anyone on Kodiak Island who knows how they made headdresses at the time when those were made... I had hope that those answers weren't lost or weren't put to sleep, and someone else is going to just give them to me."

Sense of pride, Empowerment, and Responsibility

In conjunction with a sense of responsibility in pursuing more knowledge and answers, three out of the four participants remarked on how their experiences working on their respective projects led them to feel a sense of pride and self-empowerment that was motivating in pursuing more knowledge. CM3 remarked, "I think the first and foremost feeling that I've had about the Angyaaq is that you know, a sense of pride and in learning again, how to do something like this. And then also I'm not just learning, but also teaching them how so that we can do it in the future if we decide we want to make another." CM3's feeling of pride through learning about Angyaaq construction developed into feelings of empowerment that through gaining new knowledge, there is a sense of contribution they can provide for their community. For CM1, the work on the Pinguat project shifted their relationship with themselves and the ties to the community around them. "It was really motivating to create one myself. It was motivating to examine myself as a teacher and what I would like to be as a teacher. It changed, it did, like, it built a few of those relationships that have really been valuable to my self-esteem and connecting to native women is like it's always good. It did have a positive impact on me in that way." CM2's experience impacted and motivated an internal responsibility and self-actualization of their responsibility to their community. CM2 reflected on how their community is "hungry for it" [in reference to attaining more cultural knowledge], and that more teaching needs to be done. They further explained:

It really made me feel like I am an artist, and I need to get right with that because as long as I think I'm not an artist, I'm not going to share and teach. And we've talked a lot about responsibility in the last few minutes, but I feel like as someone who knows a lot about our culture and our items and our language and our dance and our stories, it is my responsibility to share that. And I have done a lot of sharing dance and language but have really held back on the art.

Passing on Generational Knowledge

All participants identified the importance of continuing to move forward in pursuing traditional Sugpiaq knowledge. Three of the four participants specifically recognized the importance of working with and engaging the youth of their community. CM3 and CM4 both remarked on the significance of participating in the angyaaq project during the Kids Culture Camp for the youth in their community. CM4 said, "The reality is how important is what we're doing out at kids camp. I think what we're doing at kids camp is pretty vital to understanding our history." CM3 said, "I think one of the most joyous parts of this build was watching the younger kids, you know, not necessarily our middle school and high school. It was the little ones, the little ones. I saw them. They were working with the little planers, and they were working hard at it, being a part of the build. That's what I enjoyed the most." Both of these experiences exemplify the importance of working in an environment in which the youth can observe and participate alongside project participants. CM3 further elaborated on the importance of being a participant in this project as a means to be a resource for future youth to learn from.

Having somebody in the community that has learned this process and being able to share that with younger generations as they get older and possibly get more interested in the culture and bearing their culture. I think that has, well, that has changed with me. Having, I've heard that we now have the knowledge between a bunch of us community members to be able to go to the school and teach something of our culture to the students without having to bring somebody to the community.

CM3's participation in the Angyaaq led to an internal shift and realization that because of their experience, they and their community have the tools necessary to perpetuate the knowledge further in their schools. This is akin to their earlier remarks about the barriers they felt they faced in accessing heritage materials due to their location and financial constraints and how the location choice makes for a lasting impact for the community immediately and future generations. CM2 also discussed the importance of having more youth participation framed as a point of accessibility. They remarked on how it was a positive experience having one youth who participated in the Pinguat project and that they hope more projects continue to involve younger generations. CM2's experience concurs with CM3 and CM4 that youth involvement in heritage projects is significant for the Sugpiaq community, particularly when there is a desire to pass knowledge on to future generations. Their experience then further articulates the importance of making these experiences accessible for youth participation without jeopardizing their academic learning.

Research Question Three

Community Response

Of the three museum professionals, two of them identified the inherent difficulties, limitations, and problems in having a limit to how many participants could join their projects. Both Counciller and Steffian remarked on the amazement and surprise in the overwhelming response in applications from those wanting to be involved in the pinguat project and were in agreement that a priority if such a project were to be repeated, would be to involve more participants. Steffian remarked: "I wish we could have had more people; you know. I just wish more people could have participated. I think we had a really good group. It's just hard because you've got 50 people who want to do it ... to be able to hold the workshop several times or to give multiple opportunities would be ideal." The overwhelming interest in the project indicated to both Counciller and Steffian how deep the need to learn directly from heritage material. Steffian further expanded on her understanding of the restrictive nature of the project:

I think about the fact that we only had thirteen people on that panel, and there were fifty who wanted to do it. I think about that. I think about, well, I don't have enough money to bring [everybody], fly everybody to

Kodiak, or to pay for supplies for everybody. But I do have enough money to get them to teach it, to create a resource so that those who didn't get to participate get this access, and they can have this.

Steffian's remarks, in conjunction with similar comments by participants of the project, show a shared attentiveness to the impact of limited access, deciding who has the ability to access and learn from heritage materials.

Collaboration with Community Members for Community Members

One museum professional from each project remarked on how important collaboration is during the development process when determining how best to serve the specific needs of the community. Both Steffian and Haakanson ground the importance of collaborative work starting as the foundation of the project, which involves all parties being involved in the process.

It's really easy to sit behind your desk and to design a project and to implement a project and not think about what people want. But the real work and the real value to this work is when you can tie into another community..., and it's so tempting sometimes not to ask for a review or not to ask somebody to come in and sit with you and talk about it or not to do that survey or to do that consulting with elders. But that's what makes, that's what grounds a project, and that's what makes the project not just mission-focused but community-focused.

Steffian's remark on project development as community-focused is underlined by the need for inclusion, involvement, and consultation of community members throughout the process. Similarly, Haakanson reflects on his own experience of moving away from his community and developing new relationships with community members.

One of the first things I realized that I'm not a community member down here with the local tribes, and growing up in the village, growing up in Kodiak and going out, I knew right from the start that if I come in and start boasting about this and that I'm going to get dismissed. I knew that I needed to roll my sleeves up to figure out how can I show the community here what I

feel the Burke can be doing and should be doing for the communities here. And how do we do that? By practicing what we preach and by showing the communities, hey, here's what we're doing. Here's how we do it. We would love to help, but only on your terms, not our terms. I'm not going to come in and tell you how to think of yourself as a native person because that is not only a respectful way of doing things is very, I want to say dishonest way of doing things

A Living Context

The takeaway that all three museum professionals indicated as significant in their experiences with collaborating with community members was the importance of community members taking what they learned and applying it to a living context. Each remarked on their appreciation in seeing those who participated in the collaborative projects utilizing the skills and learned knowledge into their own personal projects. Counciller remarked:

I love to see people in the community picking up these arts and taking them forward, kind of like I already mentioned, with people posting things on social media, knowing that we have played a small part in the revitalization of that small part of culture...

Counciller's statement expresses her understanding that although the movement is slight, it is still an act of revitalization for the Sugpiaq community that is being carried by community members. Steffian expands on Counciller's statement on the role played in revival: "It's about training the artists to teach it, to share it so that the knowledge lives in the community because ultimately we don't let these things just be static objects in a museum. We want them to be examples of living culture." Haakanson shared concurrent experiences for those participating in the Angyaaq project. Through his project, there has been a revitalized interest in both boat making as well as skin sewing.

We've got some of the women who are interested more about the sewing. We've got individuals actually making their own model Angyaaqs like Teacon and Gage and all of the other community members who are now able to go and look at what we've done. But they can take it to

another level. And so that's it's building on it and changing that perception.

From Haakanson's remarks, we see the significance of having a point of reference for participants to utilize in recreating their own models but applying that learned knowledge to other areas of their lives. Not only does this emphasize the significance of disseminating knowledge, but also the significance in encouraging/supporting the community members to utilize that knowledge as a foundation to develop off of and offering the potential for new developments and discoveries.

Research Question Four

Developing Resources

One of those immediate identified needs that Steffian identified was the importance of long-term documentation and resources, particularly for Sugpiaq people who live outside the Alutiiq Museum's immediate reach. "More than half of the audience we serve has no access to the museum. So, for us, I think what we learned out of this project that we carry forward are the documentary pieces. This was really the first time we created resources, lasting long-term resources, beyond just sort of photo documentation or an exhibit, but resources that people can use to then study the pieces themselves [in] the pattern book or try making pieces through the video series." In addition, Counciller also reflected on the identified need to provide resource materials to Sugpiaq communities far-reaching.

And one of the things that we're working on now, and it's been a dream for a long time, is to create a comprehensive database of all known Alutiiq materials in all museums around the world so that in effect, we'll have like this map with all these little red dots on it that has oh, my gosh, here in Minnesota, in this small municipal museum, there's an incredible beaded bag or where our people, wherever they are in the world, it's like #AlutiiqEverywhere, where our people can have access.

Counciller elaborated on her recognition of the need for Sugpiaq communities on Kodiak who can't easily access the museum, as well as the Sugpiaq diaspora around the globe, as wanting to know where to find and examine additional heritage materials.

Inspiring New Collaborations

Each museum professional remarked on how their collaborative projects pushed them to reconsider what is now possible for their institutions. For the Alutiiq Museum, Steffian explains how they are utilizing their experience with the Pinguat project to inspire future programming plans. "I think at one level, they help us figure out what the next step is. For this project, for me, we knew this project was the right fit at some level, but we didn't know what came after it. And this project has spawned a bunch of other projects and a bunch of other needs for us." Steffian's example demonstrates how the development of the project was dedicated to addressing a need but also allowing the formation of future projects to occur reactively and organically based on what they observed and what new knowledge was learned. Haakanson remarked on how this experience impacts future project planning both within his own museum department as well as future projects, such as kayaks, with the community members in Kodiak.

But also, the other thing too that we're doing is the kayaks. So, we're not just doing the Angyaaqs. Yes, I'd love to do it for a larger Angyaaq, but this kind of project we are doing through working with Alfred Numoff... working with him to be able to make a kayak based on the lived knowledge that he has that he had learned from Larry Matfay and some of the other elders. So, getting him to pass his knowledge on to the next generation.

In this example, Haakanson affirms the importance of continuing to learn from and consult with community members in the development of future projects, as well as ensuring that lived knowledge continues to be passed down generationally. For the Burke Museum, Haakanson notes that "it's influenced us in our cultural department quite a bit. As people refer back to it, well, we did this. And if we're able to do this, why can't we do that? It has really changed our way of looking at what we are capable of doing. And it also forces us to be open to that because now we can't say, 'Oh, we can't do that. But we have.'"

Conclusions

The research documents the source community's significant frustrations from the continued barriers posed by traditional museological collection practices as identified in the literature. These

frustrations are rooted in the inability to regularly access and engage with their heritage materials outside of collaborative projects. These feelings are embedded in participants feeling emotionally, mentally, and spiritually tied to the objects of their ancestors, and feel equally responsible for. This desire to engage with heritage materials manifests in a desire to physically interact with the materials their ancestors also held, to be permitted to reattain traditional knowledge that heritage materials possess, and to be offered the opportunity to impart wisdom into the next generation of cultural bearers. For project participants, collaboration provided an opportunity for community members to utilize collection materials to develop feelings of kinship, and pride in their culture. It also served as a vehicle to spark new inquiries and theories about their culture that they would like to have answered.

The overwhelming response the Alutiiq Museum received in project applications underlines the desperate need for, and deep interest in projects such as these. Although it has been understood through these findings the limitations of having a set number of allotted participants, arming even a few with knowledge is remarkably significant. This is due to information being spread through participants becoming teachers themselves and bringing knowledge back into a living context. This further reiterates the power of supporting community members in order for them to support one another, as well as the significance of continual engagement between community members who want to have more opportunities to learn from heritage materials. For museum professionals, the experience of facilitating collaborative have propelled them to reconsider what is now possible for their institutions in regard to future projects as well as the development of long-term documentation and resources.

Museums have long been considered authoritarian figures as they wield historical narratives. Building trust involves considering source communities as equal participants in engagement projects. Museums have the privilege and positionality to make a drastic impact in empowering the next generation of culture bearers. Our institutions are warehouses filled with sleeping knowledge looking to be reawakened by their relatives and beckoned home.

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To all those marginalized, colonized, undervalued, underrepresented, and yet still thriving and fighting; this is for you. Our burdens will not go unnoticed.

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To everyone else: you know who you are. I love you.

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Appendix I: Recruitment and Consent Talking Points

Recruitment and Consent Talking Points

Rose Mathison Museology Graduate Program University of Washington

Repatriating Knowledge: Community Engagement Through Museum Collections

Recruitment talking-points will include:

1. Confirmation that the participant is 18 years of age or older.
2. Confirmation of which activity (case study) this participant had engaged with.
3. Confirmation that can participate in a 30-60 minute interview.

Consent talking-points to be given prior to the start of the interview:

1. Researcher's name and affiliation.
2. General background of the study.
3. Purpose of the study.
4. That the study is completely voluntary. Reiterate that during the interview, they may request to not answer any question, as well as request to end the interview at any time. Also, if at any point they feel discomfort during the duration of the study, to let the researcher know and they will end the process.
5. Participation involves a 30-60 minute interview.
6. That the interview will be recorded for this study only, held confidentially, and to only be used as a tool for analysis. Recordings will not be shared with anyone else outside of the researcher conducting the interview.
7. Request of how the participant would like to be addressed in this study. The individual will be asked if they would like to be named in the research study, would like to go by a pseudonym, or if they would like to be named completely anonymous. If no preference is given, it will be defaulted to anonymous.
8. Contact information of a study contact person as well as faculty advisor.

Appendix II: Interview Questions for Community Members

Instrument

This is a guide for semi-structured interviews to be conducted with museum professionals and community partners who have participated in collaborative projects with one another. The guide provides talking points and a general sequence for interviews. Not all questions may be asked in an interview, and additional questions may arise during the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee.

Interview Questions - Community Member

Introduction

1. Ask for information about self & role within the community.
2. Describe how you were introduced and become involved with this project.

Perspective on Project

3. What were your thoughts and feelings as you worked on this project?
4. What did you enjoy most working on this? Least?
5. What value, if any, is there in a project like this? Why or why not?
6. Would you participate in something like this again?
 - a. If so, what would you like to see done differently?
 - b. If not, what keeps you from wanting to participate again?

Perspective on Museums

7. Have you ever worked with/learned from a museum collection prior to working on this project?
 - a. If no:
 - i. Why not?
 - ii. Was there anything about this project that you found surprising or unexpected?
 - b. If yes:
 - i. What was your prior experience?
 - ii. How do these compare?
 - iii. Was there anything about this project that you found surprising or unexpected?
8. What more can museums do to engage with your community?
9. What are some best practices or structural changes you'd like to see within museums?

Community Relationship

10. Has what you experienced and what you learned during the course of this project changed your relationship or understanding of yourself?
11. Has what you experienced and what you learned during the course of this project changed your relationship or understanding of your community?

Wrap-Up

12. Anything we haven't touched on that you find value in sharing?
13. Invite community member to reach out to me if they think of anything new. Provide best contact information for them.

Appendix III: Interview Questions for Museum Professionals

Instrument

This is a guide for semi-structured interviews to be conducted with museum professionals and community partners who have participated in collaborative projects with one another. The guide provides talking points and a general sequence for interviews. Not all questions may be asked in an interview, and additional questions may arise during the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee.

Interview Questions - Museum Professional

Intro

1. Ask for information about self, role within the museum, and within this project.

Perspective on Project

2. Describe what led to the forming of this project.
3. How/why was this particular object(s) chosen for this project?
4. Was there a need identified prior to this project that this project intended to fulfill?
 - a. If yes, what was it?
 - b. If no, what do you think this project fulfills for the intended community?
5. Has the museum done a project like this previously?
 - a. If no:
 - i. Why not?
 - ii. What was the catalyst to bring this project into fruition?
 - b. If yes:
 - i. What was it?
 - ii. How do these compare?
6. Was there anything about this project that you found surprising or unexpected?
7. If you were to repeat this specific project, what would you do differently?
8. Will/Is something like this project happening again?

Perspective on Community Response

9. What is your perception of how the source community responded to this project?
10. If there was engagement with the community outside of the intended source community (ie other staff, museum professionals, the general public, etc.), what is your perception of their response to this project?

Museum Practice

11. Why, if at all, should museum collections be valued?
12. How can projects such as this broaden our understanding and/or relationships with the communities we serve?
13. How, if at all, do projects such as this differ from the ways museums have affected and/or interacted with source communities of the past?
14. What's the most important outcome from a project like this?
15. Is the museum utilizing this project to influence internal dialogue, internal practice, and/or future plans?
 - a. If yes, in what ways?
 - b. If no, how else is the experiences from this project being utilized?

Wrap-Up

16. Anything we haven't touched on that you find value in sharing?
17. Invite museum professional to reach out to me if they think of anything new. Provide best contact information for them.