

Looking Through Glass: Understanding Visitor Perceptions
of Visible Storage Methods in Museums

Sena Dawes

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2016

Committee:

Jessica Luke

Holly Barker

Hollye Keister

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Museology

© Copyright 2016

Sena Dawes

University of Washington

Abstract

Looking Through Glass: Understanding Visitor Perceptions
of Visible Storage Methods in Museums

Sena Dawes

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Jessica J. Luke, Ph.D.
Museology

Museums today try to increase the public's access to their collections in a variety of ways. Visible storage is one such popular method. However, there is little research done on what the public thinks about this kind of access. This study sought to understand visitor perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. Thirty visitors were interviewed in the Multiversity Gallery at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC. Results suggest that the majority of visitors understood the purpose of visible storage, and believe that it is very or extremely important for museums to provide access to their collections. While most visitors reacted positively to visible storage, many felt overwhelmed by the amount of objects in the space. Study findings have implications for continued conversations around what visitors expect from museums and what they are getting out of visible storage methods

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Acknowledgements

There is a slew of individuals who have been a huge part of this entire process that this thesis would not have been possible without.

I am eternally grateful for my committee; I could not have asked for better people to be a part of this. Thank you Holly for chatting with me over pizza at that Burke event, your thoughts and ideas and willingness to listen gave me the confidence it took to find this topic. Hollye, thank you for sharing your collections knowledge with me, helping me narrow and solidify my final topic. And Jessica, thank you for being a text message or phone call away at my lowest points and for the being the most supportive advisor I have ever had. You always seemed to understand what I am trying to say and you constantly pushed me to think more and get everything done in a fairly timely manner. This thesis really would not have turned out the way it did without you and for that I am forever grateful.

I want to thank the Museum of Anthropology for allowing me to conduct interviews at their amazing museum. The short weekend I spent there was the smoothest interaction I have had with an institution and I just want thank Moya Waters for setting everything up and the amazing staff and volunteers for being so incredibly helpful and welcoming. I look forward to visiting your museum again in the future. I also want to thank Kelly Price from the Yellowstone Art Museum. Even though I did not get a single interview all weekend, thank you for being so welcoming and supportive while I was visiting.

I also want to thank my friend, Calie Holden, for helping me collect my data. I know how much you love conducting interviews so I thank you from the bottom of my heart for doing these with me. I'm so appreciative of you trekking all the way to Canada with me for such a short weekend and jumping into data collection. You are an amazing human and don't worry, I didn't

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

get too tired listening to your voice on all of those interviews. I also want to thank my Museology cohort, particularly my thesis group, for making this process seem like a group one and just for be the most amazing people on this planet.

And I want to thank my parents, brother, and sister for being super supportive throughout my grad school experience. There really are no words to accurately express how much you mean to me and how much you guys inspire me to do the things I do. So thanks for everything.

And lastly, I want to thank Courtney and the staff at Finn McCool's. Sunday's at Finn's with my friends was sometimes the only thing to get me through the week, so thank you for taking care of us stressed out grad students. Bacon cheese fries for life.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	11
Implications	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Museum Collections Access	12
Digitizing Museum Collections	13
Behind the Scenes Tours	14
Visible Storage	15
Public Perceptions of Visible Storage	18
Summary	21
Chapter 3: Methods	23
Research Site	23
Description of Sample and Data Collection	24
Data Analysis	25
Ethics	25
Limitations	26
Chapter 4: Results	27
1. What about visible storage attracts and interests participants?	27
2. In what ways do visitors understand the purpose and importance of visible storage in museums?	33
3. In what ways do visible storage methods affect participants' museum experience?	38

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications	42
Conclusions	42
Implications	45

Bibliography	47
--------------	----

Appendices	
Appendix A: Interview Guide	50
Appendix B: Analysis Codebook	52

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

List of Images

Image 1: Photo of the Multiversity Gallery at the Museum of Anthropology	23
Image 2: Photo of the Multiversity Gallery at the Museum of Anthropology	23

List of Figures

Figure 1: “Why did you come to the museum today?” n=30	25
Figure 2: Participants’ initial reactions to the visible storage space in the museum	27
Figure 3: Importance of collections access (n=30)	35
Figure 4: Percent of collection on display at any time (n=37)	37
Figure 5: Rate how much the gallery enhanced your experience (n=34)	39

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Broad, a new contemporary art museum in Los Angeles, reported almost 200,000 visitors in the first twelve weeks it was open in 2015 (Vankin, 2015) and free tickets are regularly booked out months in advance. The Broad built their entire facility around their collection, with a large, central “vault” that allows visitors to see inside the museum’s collection and see what goes on behind the scenes in the museum. While the Broad’s approach is very different, it is not necessarily new. Increasing collections access for museum visitors has become a topic of interest in the museum community over the past decade (Gardner, 2007; Kelly, 1999; Thistle, 1990), with increased discussion about the fact that museum collections are held for the public (in most cases) and should be made available, or visible, as demand calls for it (Museums Association, 2010; Matassa; 2010; Keene, 2008). The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) (2010) recommends that museums not only preserve their collections, but also provide physical and intellectual access to them. However, most of the articles on AAM’s website regarding access to collections are about digital and online collections, with very little focused on physical access to collections.

“Visible storage” (sometimes known as “open storage” or “study storage”) is a popular method that has been used increasingly over the years to enhance physical access to museum collections. Visible storage typically refers to situations in which collections are “systematically presented in high-density arrangements” without interpretation but still with information about the objects (Thistle, 1990, p. 207). Visible storage can also refer to showing collections work spaces that the public can see from a distance (usually behind glass) (Kelly, 1999).

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Since the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) created the concept of visible storage in the 1970s, over 45 museums utilize visible storage methods including the Brooklyn Museum, the Witte Museum, the Arizona State Museum, the National Museum of Ireland, and the Art Gallery of Ontario (Young, 2014). Museum professionals and museums all over the country and the world have decided that opening up their collections in this way is an effective way to “democratize” their collections (Bohlen, 2011; Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009; Thistle 1990):

“‘This speaks to making a public institution more public,’ Mr. [Arnold] Lehman said. ‘What is in storage has always been one of those multiple secrets that museums keep. This will give people an idea of what storage looks like and what is in there’ (Bohlen, 2011).

This is a common sentiment amongst museum professionals to describe the general purpose of visible storage (Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009) but there is a piece of the puzzle missing when it comes to what museum visitors think about visible storage.

Museums have been gaining understanding of their visitors over the years (Museums Association, 2005). Increasing collections access is one way that museums have been attempting to address the needs of their visitors. Some literature describes visitors as not knowing much about what happens behind the scenes (Gyllenhaal, 1996) but interested in finding out (Kelly, 1999). Then, in other studies, visitors were confused by visible storage areas (Slater, 1995). The question “Do visitors care?” comes up in current discussions surrounding collections access but it is a question that is often overlooked (Drake, 2009; Proudlove, 2001; Kelly, 1999). In the few times this question is actually addressed in a study it is typically not often focused on (Caesar, 2007; Gardner 2007). There has also been work that has scratched the surface of the effectiveness of behind-the-scenes tours of museums (Caesar, 2007) (and behind-the-scenes

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

tours are frequently mentioned when referring to effective increased collections access) but there has been little research addressing the “do visitors care” question in regard to visible storage methods of collections access.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to understand public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. The study is driven by three research questions:

1. What about visible storage attracts and interests visitors?
2. In what ways do visitors understand the purpose and importance of visible storage in museums?
3. In what ways does visible storage affect visitors’ museum experiences?

Implications

This study will add to the body of literature surrounding increased collections access in museums while also getting the field to be more purposeful in the ways they understand and meet the demands of their public. By knowing what visitors think about visible storage and what type of experiences they are having because of it, museums can begin to better understand the role of visible storage methods in increasing collections access.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research study was to understand public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. This research is situated predominantly in the literature on museum collections access, which discusses several methods of increasing collections access including visible storage. In addition, there is a small amount of research done on the public perception of increasing collections access and an even smaller amount done on public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums.

Museum Collections Access

The American Alliance of Museums' (2010) Characteristics of Excellence states that's museums are to "provide public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation" and to "provide physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources" (p. 1) Aside from these statements, there is not much about how to go about providing this access. These very same standards are used in other museum associations, like the Association of State and Local History. The AASLH (2012) takes these standards one step further and outlines the different levels of fulfilling this standard; the collection policy should promote collections access and providing and promoting opportunities for access to the collections are two of these levels. These standards, unlike AAM's, actually suggest ways to provide access including "exhibitions, tours, educational programming, publications, electronic media, and research" (p. 2). Other than these statements however, there is very little in the museum field's standards addressing physical access to a museum's collections.

Most Museum collections are owned by the public and should be treated as such (Gardner, 2007; Museums Association, 2005; Keene, 2008, AASLH). To address this fact, museums and museum professionals have called for museums to increase their public access to

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

collections (Caesar, 2007) because having greater access to collections is seen as “an imperative and important part of museums being accessible by all” (Kelly, 1999, p. 2). Keene (2008) defines access as “physical access to collections by visitors or users who are not the staff of the museum” (p. 12). Interestingly, Keene does not mention either online access to collections, nor does she acknowledge intellectual access. Museums have attempted to increase this access in different ways, one of which is digitizing collections.

Digitizing Museum Collections

A common way of increasing access to museum collections has been to digitize the collection. And is evident by the amount of digitizing collections resources provided by AAM is way that museums are turning to more frequently. The trend of digitizing collections stems from art museums who have “gone furthest towards making collections publically available” (Gardner, 2007, p. 44). In the UK, digitizing collections has become such a common method of creating access that all national museums and galleries in London have at least part of their stored collections online (Gardner, 2007). The trend is not limited to the UK. The Institute of Library and Museum Services granted over two dozen grants in the last years to fund the digitization of various museum collections.

The Smithsonian’s Natural History Museum faced the problem of having to open their back rooms to the public and decided to turn to digitization of their collections. The catalog was made available to the public online with photographs and descriptions of the majority of their specimens (The Economist, 2000). In addition to digitizing their collection, they also created a working laboratory to be viewed by the visitors.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

While digitizing collections has its advantages, it comes with difficulties. Technology itself becomes difficult to make usable for a wide variety of people. Sometimes, strict search parameters can make it difficult to find what one might be looking for (Wickell, 2014). There can be a “disconnect between what the museum feels is understandable and what the user felt they understood” (p. 42). But, having search parameters does allow visitors to truly customize their visit all the way down to any object they wish to learn more about.

Some of the other ways museums have begun to create physical access has been to do occasional behind-the-scene tours, some special programming to highlight the collections, and probably most notably, visible storage.

Behind the Scenes Tours

As a way to increase collection access, some museums give visitors tours of their storage and work place areas. These kinds of tours are often used by museums with large objects and typically includes access to talk to or observe staff (Keene, 2008). But there is a question of which is better: collections being used for intensive research by the few or the more fleeting use by many (Keene, 2008).

Caesar’s 2007 study focused on these behind the scenes tours and describes it as a replacement for having open storage centers.

“[Behind the scenes tours] bring together the three facets of the museum: ‘a triangular relationship: knowledge and ideas, and people’ and make the collections ‘central to the user’s experience of museum’” (p. 3).

The purpose of this study was to examine 5 aspects of the behind the scenes tour experience: public perception, who attends the tours, visitor expectations of the tour, why visitors went on the tour, and whether or not public access is important. Results showed that visitors found the

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

tours to be interesting and an opportunity to see objects not typically displayed (Caesar, 2007).

But the question “What is access to collections?” was not answered by these results. Visitors also had a difficult time understanding the quantity of objects museums hold in storage and how much makes it out to display. As far as expectation, most visitors on the tour had little to no expectations before the tour, did not know what to expect, and seemed sometimes overwhelmed but seemed to enjoy the tour anyway.

Randi Korn and Associates conducted an evaluation at the Burke Museum to understand how visitors experience behind the scenes opportunities (2012). The results found conflicting effects from having behind the scenes tours. The study put participants in three different scenarios: collections storeroom without interpretation, collections storeroom with written interpretation, and collections storeroom with volunteer-lead interpretation. The study found that as interpretation increased, participant engagement also increased. However, it also found that participants got the key ideas whether they got a small glimpse into the space or spent time talking to a volunteer. Participants in this study were asked to rate the importance of certain statements:

“...it should not go without notice that questionnaire respondents indicated that “Seeing collections not on display – in a museum storage area” was only of moderate interest to visitors and “Watching a researcher study the collection in his/her workspace, while reading about his/her research on a text panel” was of less interest” (p. 11).

Visible Storage

The concept of visible storage builds upon the “democratization of museum collections” (Thistle, 207, 1994; Bohlen, 2011). Thistle (1994) offers this definition:

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“Visible storage, sometimes referred to as ‘open storage’ or ‘study storage’ combines two functions that modern museology generally considers separate—storage *and* display. In visible storage, collections are systematically presented in high-density arrangements that lack interpretive labels but include access to the information available on each object” (p. 207).

This storage method is thought to have originated from the University of British Columbia in the 1970s and made popular by the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Luce Study Center in 1988 (Bohlen, 2011). An interesting aspect of visible storage is how similar it is to how early museums would display their objects: cases filled to the brim with related objects with very little to no interpretation or information.

Museums utilize visible storage in a few different ways. High-density storage cases are a commonly used method that looks very similar to an exhibit. Cases are filled with objects that are typically related in some way with very little to no interpretation or labels. Some professionals believe that the experience one has in open storage is actually determined by the interpretation rather than the dense display itself (Museums Association, 2005). This is generally free to all visitors since it is part of the museum’s exhibits and can sometimes be used to fill unused corridors or gallery space (Keene, 2008). The Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Arts and Sciences, and the South Florida Museum are just a few museums (in the U.S.) that utilize high density storage cases.

Another way for a museum to have visible storage is by having walk-in space to the actual storage areas, very similar to behind-the-scenes tours museums might give. Museums, as an alternate to having visitors being able to walk straight into storage, can build a viewing window into collections and sometimes collections work space (similar to visible labs). The Logan Museum of Anthropology uses high density storage cases but they also have created a workspace amidst the cases that is visible to guests called “the Cube” (Logan Museum of

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Anthropology). The Yellowstone Art Museum has their entire storage area open to the public called the “Visible Vault” that lets guests see where everything is stored as well where the staff actually works (Yellowstone Art Museum).

Because of the variety of ways museums can use this method, visible storage is used frequently to give maximum access to the collections, and show visitors the full extent of what the museum holds in storage (Slater, 1995; Matassa, 2010). According to Morris Museum’s Steven Miller, visible storage is a response to visitors’ complaints that museums are not able to show everything all the time; open storage seeks to make the museum more transparent (Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009).

From the point of view of museum professionals, there are some who see visible storage as a viable and effective way of increasing collections access, and there are others who argue against it. Arnold Lehman, while director of the Brooklyn Museum, explains that visible storage makes a museum more public because it gives people insight into “one of those multiple secrets that museums keep” (Bohlen, 2001, p. 4). University of British Columbia’s Anthony Shelton specifies that open storage (particularly at UBC’s Museum of Anthropology) has increased access “for source communities and student based research projects” (Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009). Others argue that no matter how museums open their storage, the public enjoy the behind-the-scenes opportunities (Matassa, 2010). But, the fact that this is reminiscent of nineteenth-century museums brings up some concerns from other museum professionals:

“[visible storage] seems more of a throwback to the old-fashioned notions of European museums in which the object is put out there for those who know what they are looking at, and not for those who do not” (Bohlen, 2001, p. 2.

Steven Miller, while finding visible storage an effective method also says that the facilities he has seen using visible storage encourage very little visitor interaction other

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

than a typical “looking at things” type of interaction (Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009).

Suzanne Keene expresses a similar opinion, claiming that visitors tend to be confused when confronted with visible storage because it is not in the typical exhibit form they are used to (Keene, 2008).

Public Perceptions of Visible Storage

Much of what we know about the effectiveness of visible storage comes from the opinions of museum professionals, rather than from research with visitors themselves. As of late, museums have started to pay more attention to what their visitors want from them and now understand these wants more, but there is still much to learn (Museums Association, 2005). The demand for increased access to museum collections is not something that most museums are aware of or keep track of.

The “Collections for People” study by the UCL Institute of Archaeology in 2008 looked at how the public was using museum collections in the UK. It was an extension of the Museums Association 2005 “Collections for the future” report and looked to understand what to do with collections and access to collections. The research answered four questions:

- “What is the size and nature of the collections as a resource?
- How much are different types of collections used by people other than museum staff?
- How do users perceive this service?
- How do museums provide for collections use?” (Keene, 2008, p. 11)

All museums in the UK were sent questionnaires to get general museum demographics and a smaller sample was used to find out how visitors were using the collections. The user data showed that there was an increase in public demand for collections access and that demand increased in museums that had high collections users before the study

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

(Keene, 2008). The study also looked at the different ways guests were accessing collections and 50% of museums were using “visible display stores” as a way to create collections access. This study is probably one of the more extensive studies done on public perception of collections access and it is also one of the few.

Four different methods of visible storage were described in the study: typological displays, visible storage, open access storage, and study centers. The study found that typological visible storage might be less engaging but dense displays were seen as more impressive to visitors (Keene, 2008).

A common theme in the literature on public perceptions of collections access and visible storage is that visitors do not typically enter a museum hoping to find out about what the museum has behind-the-scenes. When the Field Museum in Chicago conducted a study to understand visitor awareness of the research conducted at the institution, visitors were described to be at different levels of knowledge about what goes on behind-the-scenes. Most of the visitors interviewed were at Level I, partially described as never really thinking about what goes on behind-the-scenes at the museum. This interest and awareness did change during the interview, but most visitors started out the interview not really thinking about what goes on behind closed doors (Gyllenhaal et al., 1996).

More often than not, most visitors simply do not know what having access to stored collections even means. Lynda Kelly (1999) asked a very important question about visitors’ knowledge about collections access that she claims is not being answered by museums: “Do they [visitors] even care?” She found that visitors do not actually know

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

much about what collections access even is and that some are interested in what goes on behind-the-scenes.

On the flip side, in a study conducted in London museums, visitors said “it was not necessary to provide the public with more information on access to stored collections” (Gardner, 2007, p. 50). The study, conducted by the UCL Institute of Archaeology in 2007, was another study to see how often and in what ways collections were being used. This one focused on London museums instead of museums throughout the UK. It sought to understand public and staff perception of accessibility, strategies used to increase accessibility, factors that hinder accessibility, and dream strategies for improving accessibility (Gardner, 2007). The study used a survey to get professional as well as a visitors’ perspective. They found that a low percentage of museums keep track of how many people use the collections, but museums tend to record the number of visitors rather than the number of objects accessed. The museums that tended to have high collections use were large institutions (national museums and galleries).

For the visitor survey, 30 visitors were asked six questions (then two questions and 5 visitors were added after analysis) outside five museums in London. The majority of these visitors understood that the majority of collections were held in storage but all visitors overestimated how much was actually on display. Three quarters of those surveyed thought that the public should be given more information on how to access collections (Gardner, 2007). The important take-away from these different opinions is that it should not be assumed that visitors even want this access (Proudlove, 2001).

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

When it comes to visitor perception of visible storage methods, there is much less literature than behind-the-scenes tours or just general access. Something the literature does have in common though, is the fact the visitors very rarely visit museums particularly for their visible storage displays. The Luce Center as described by Carrie Barratt “is rarely the general visitor’s destination, but people do stumble in and enjoy it.” (Bohlen, 2001, p. 2. More often than not, visitors do not typically understand what they are looking at when they see visible storage and are sometimes confused by it (Slater, 1995). The Glenbow experiment was a study of a storage system called Visible Storage at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada. This study was based off the ideas that “the public has the right to complete access to its cultural heritage, and that the public is interested in seeing large numbers of objects normally held in restricted collections areas” (Slater, 1995, p. 13). The study was conducted by monitoring visitor reactions and visitor interviews during the exhibit. Almost immediately, staff found that people did not readily enter the exhibit space because while the intent may be clear to staff, it was not clear to their visitors. Visitors said they did not know what the space was, could not understand why it was created, and were intimidated by the area’s design and frustrated by lack of labels. So, while there is a decent amount on what museum professionals think about visible storage, there is little on what the public specifically, thinks about it.

Summary

At the end of Laura Gardner’s 2007 study on stored collections, she said there is one question left to really answer, “What does the public want?” Because there is so little research done to answer this question, museums have a hard time offering things the public will appreciate. Asking visitors what collections access even is has proven to be a

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

difficult question to ask (Kelly, 1999; Caesar, 2007), and most of the literature does not try to answer this question. Much of what is known about visible storage comes from museum professionals, not visitors. Some professionals like Arnold Lehman and Anthony Shelton (2009) see visible storage as an effective way of increasing access to museum collections while others like Keene (2008), Miller (2009), and Slater (1995) raise questions and show evidence that visible storage may not in fact be the most effective way to increase this accessibility. The important difference between these two schools of thought is the visitor: Keene (2008), Miller (2009), and Slater (1995) along with Gardner (2007) and Kelly (1999) are the few sources of literature that ask visitors what they think of visible storage and none of these could fully agree with professional perceptions of visible storage. And despite the fact that these studies addressed the visitor perception, their studies did not fully address the visitor experiences with visible storage. Addressing these differences in opinion can be a way to accurately understand what visible storage does for a guest's visit. This study will aim to focus on visitor perceptions of visible storage and attempt to answer the question, "What does the public want?"

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What about visible storage attracts and interests visitors?
2. In what ways does visible storage affect visitors' museum experiences?
3. How does visible storage influence the way visitors think about the museum?

This study used a descriptive survey design and collected data using semi-structured interviews with museum visitors. This chapter describes the research site, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and methodological limitations.

Research Site

Data was collected at The Museum of Anthropology (MoA). MoA is well known for being one of the first museums to utilize visible storage (Bohlen, 2001; Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009). The museum's Multiversity Gallery space uses a high density cases (100 glass cases with 450+ drawers) storage method that includes having just under a third of their collection displayed (Ahrens, 2010). The exhibit is organized geographically and the objects were chosen by the community the objects represent.



Image 1 and 2: Photos of the Museum of Anthropology, Sena Dawes 2016

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Description of Sample and Data Collection

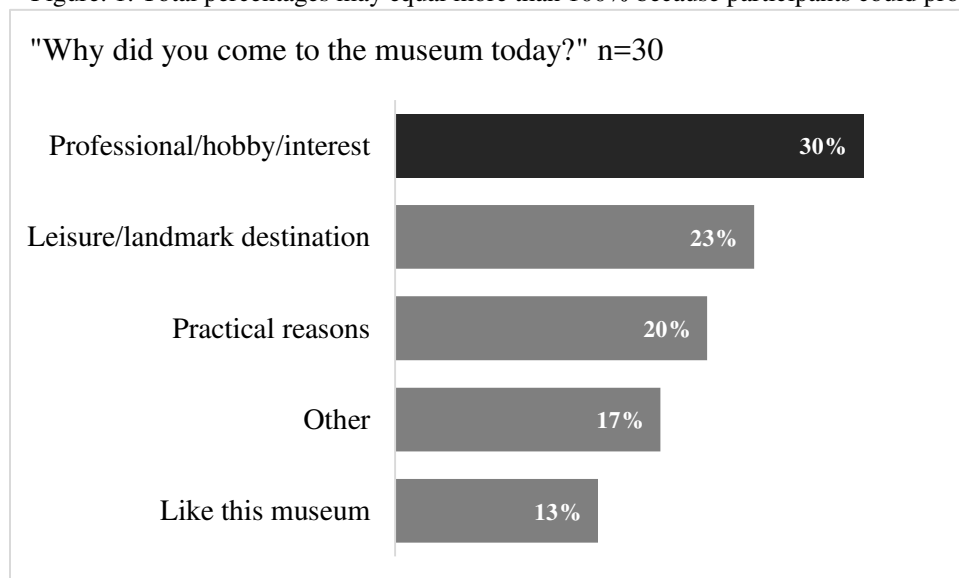
A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with museum visitors at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC. Semi-structured interview questions were intended to address the study's research questions (see Appendix A). Interviews were conducted over the course of two weekend days in March 2016. The researcher and data collector were stationed at 2 of the 3 main entrances/exits to the Multiversity Gallery. Every third visitor was approached and asked to answer few questions about their visit. Those that agreed were read a statement of consent before starting the interview. The interviews were recorded with the data collectors' cell phones and lasted anywhere between two and twelve minutes.

Thirty visitors to the Museum of Anthropology were interviewed. The interview began with some questions to help describe the participants at the Museum of Anthropology. Over half of the participants interviewed have never been to the museum before. Of those who have visited the museum, only a third had visited in the last couple of years. People interviewed came in a variety of groups including groups with children, adult only groups and adults visiting alone.

Participants came to the museum for a variety of reasons. Almost a third of participants said one of the reasons they came was because they had an interest/curiosity in the museum, in the museum's architecture, or in the museum's content.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Figure. 1: Total percentages may equal more than 100% because participants could provide more than one answer to the question.



Data Analysis

The interviews from the Museum of Anthropology were analyzed using Excel and NVivo. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed using an emergent, inductive coding system. See Appendix B for the codebook that was used.

Ethics

As part of this study, interviews were chosen as the method by which to collect data. In order to conduct these interviews, the researcher had to submit her work to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Washington. IRB assures the protection of the rights of human subjects taking part in research. This research fell under IRB's exempt category because of the anonymity of the participants and its low invasive nature. It is important to think about the effect that one's research can have on the participants and IRB ensures that researchers think about this effect when conducting research. It is vital to keep the information gained from the participants' private and confidential and to obtain informed consent from each participant

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

(Adams, 2013). This study did not record names or any identifying information and all the interviews were saved on password protected devices and will not be shared publically.

Part of the American Evaluators Association's guiding principles also focuses on respect for the people involved. AEA holds to the expectation that evaluators should abide by professional ethics including obtaining informed consent and fully explaining the study to its participants (AEA, 2004). AEA also specifies that evaluators and researchers should seek to understand and respect the differences in their participants and to be able to make appropriate accommodations. They also emphasize the importance of looking at the larger picture and how one's research can affect more people than intended.

Limitations

Limitations in this study include the amount of sites that were able to be studied. Four sites with visible storage were contacted and three replied. Of those three, two (including the Museum of Anthropology) were visited and one (the Yellowstone Art Museum) yielded zero interviews.

The Yellowstone Art Museum's visible storage is called the Visible Vault. The Vault is a separate building behind the museum that visitors can get a free badge from the front desk and go into Vault during their visit. During the data collection at this museum, the researcher was stationed in the Visible Vault for the first two days and there were no visitors in the vault during this time. The third day, the researcher, under advisement from her chair, attempted to conduct interviews. After being stationed at the museum front desk for 3 hours, the researcher still did not get any interviews. Because of this, the sample does not fully represent visitors experiences with different types of visible storage. A second limitation is that there may have

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

been slight differences between the interviews due to there being two different people conducting the interviews.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter summarizes the results from this research organized according to the study's research questions.

1. What about visible storage attracts and interests participants?

Four interview questions tapped what it was about visible storage that attracted and interested study participants: 1) What did you think of this gallery? 2) What was the first thing you noticed in the gallery? 3) How would you describe this gallery to someone who had never seen it before? and 4) What did you find most interesting about this gallery?

Responses to the question about what participants thought of the museum's visible storage space were coded into five emergent categories: 1) General reactions; 2) Comments on the quantity of objects; 3) Specific reactions to the physical space; and 4) Comments on a specific component of the visible storage space; and 5) Other. Table 1 shows the distribution of responses across these categories, with the majority providing general reactions and/or commenting on the sheer quantity of objects in the space.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Table 1: Participants' initial reactions to the visible storage space in the museum.

Total percentage may equal more than 100% because participants were able to say as much as they wanted about the space.

	General reactions	Comments on quantity of objects	Reactions to physical space	Comment on specific visible storage component	Other
Percent of participants (n=30)	80%	53%	33%	27%	13%
Examples	<p>“Pretty awesome.”</p> <p>“It’s great. It’s nice to see the small pieces, the weaving, the masks and that.”</p>	<p>“Overwhelming, hard to take it all in, so many objects, the drawers, the pull out drawers...”</p> <p>“It’s amazing. To have everything adjacent that way...It’s so dense though...it was a little overwhelming to see after seeing the other one because it’s a totally different kind of experience. This had so much going on at the same time.”</p>	<p>“Beautiful, really big, so much stuff, needed 4 or 5 hours to go through everything...”</p> <p>“I understand it has to be dimly lit, [but] it’s a bit dark because I’m over 50, so that’s the only thing.”</p>	<p>“I liked the drawers and the interactivity of it...”</p> <p>“Read the panel [that said] this [stuff in the Multiversity Gallery] is normally hidden away from the public...”</p>	<p>“It’s a multicultural world so we should learn what’s going on in past generations of different cultures”</p> <p>“Some of this art doesn’t usually get much about them and it [the gallery] was really about them and not the tourist trade.”</p>

Participants were then asked to describe the first thing they noticed when they entered the visible storage space. Responses were coded into four emergent categories: 1) Specific objects/aspect; 2) Variety/quantity of objects; 3) The look/feel of the space; and 4) Other. Two-thirds (n=30) of

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

the study participants said that it was a *specific object or specific aspect* of the visible storage space that first caught their attention. Quite a few participants mentioned masks or baskets:

“The colors of the masks, the reds, the blacks. It stands out and the brightness catches your eye visually.”

“Nothing was the same, the baskets all have different designs.”

A few participants talked about other objects in the visible storage gallery:

“The woven Harley. My husband said, ‘Look, there’s a woven Harley!’”

“It [coat/parka] was the first thing I saw when I walked in the door. It was a big stand and eye catching!”

Thirty-seven percent (n=30) of study participants mentioned *the quantity or variety of objects* as what first caught their attention. Most used phrases like “lots of stuff” and “sheer amount” when describing what drew them into the space. Participants also made comments about the variety of objects in the space:

“The ceramics. There are so many different [objects]...the richness in variety [got my attention].”

“The differences between cultural artifacts.”

Other participants emphasized not the variety of objects, but the *amount of objects* in the visible storage gallery:

“The sheer number of them [baskets] was eye catching, pretty insane!”

Approximately one quarter of participants (n=30) mentioned that *the look of the space* was what stood out to them:

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“It was dark.”

“The glass. Surrounded by glass. Probably because I have kids, but I kept thinking

‘Ah, don’t touch the glass!’”

A few (10%, n=30) participants gave *other* responses to the question:

“Interested in the main hall [of the museum] and Erikson’s architecture, walked through the gallery hallway.”

To further understand what aspects of visible storage attracted participants, participants were then asked to describe the space as if they were explaining it to someone who had never seen it. These responses were coded into seven emergent categories: 1) Quantity of objects; 2) Organization/layout of the visible storage gallery; 3) Multicultural/objects from a variety of cultures; 4) Look of the space; 5) Hands on/interactive nature of the space; 6) Plan visit before coming; 7) Other.

The majority (67%, n=30) of the thirty participants mentioned *the high quantity of objects* in their description of the visible storage space:

“Dense. Multi-layered. Thought provoking. Lots of different things going on in a small scale but lots happening.”

“Don’t let the sheer volume scare you...”

“Overwhelming, lots to see.”

One third of the participants (30%, n=30) referenced the *organization and layout* of the visible storage gallery. Typically, their comments related to where and how objects were placed:

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“I would say it’s well arranged and there’s little notes you can read that will explain...”

“Lots of museums have little plaques filled with info, overload, and these are under load. I would like a little more info about them.”

“The layout...lots of natural light, high ceilings, done in a way that it shows the pieces really well.”

One third of participants (30%, n=30) also described the visible storage space as *multicultural*. This refers to participants referring to the wide range of object content or how the exhibit displays objects from all over the world:

“Detailed, a lot of different stuff from all over the world.”

“Extremely diverse, so many different things from different cultures.”

“Hundreds and hundreds of artifacts and objects ranging from...seems to be mostly Pacific Northwest objects? But there's other things in there, too.”

Less than a third of study participants talked about *the look of the space* (23%, n=30), the *hands-on nature* of the gallery (17%, n=30), and said that the best way to experience the visible storage gallery is to *come with a plan* (17%, n=30).

“I dunno. It’s colorful, interesting.”

“I love opening drawers, just amazing! Even if you opened the top one...be prepared for an onslaught of information, sometimes it's just too much!”

“I would tell others to be more specific about what they want to look at.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

A few participants (10%, n=30) gave other responses to the question:

“Recommend people come and see it.”

“The tour was great and the website is helpful.”

Finally, participants were asked to describe what they found most interesting about the visible storage space. Responses were coded into six emergent categories: 1) Specific themes; 2) Comparisons/variation; 3) Specific objects; 4) Personally drawn to something; 5) Quantity of objects; and 6) Other.

Almost half of participants (43%, n=30) referred to *a specific theme* when describing what interested them most about the visible storage space. This refers to participants who did not mention a specific object.

“The functional items, the clothing, the tools, the serving items, the culture of serving and sharing food--it teaches something.”

“The masks, the jewelry.”

Approximately one third of participants (23%, n=30) referred to *a specific object*.

“I was struck by these two woven figures with shells for eyes.”

“The Buddha figure. Why? Umm, it’s Greek looking.”

Just over a quarter of participants (27%, n=30) found the *comparisons between objects* and the *variety of objects* most interesting. Participants seemed to appreciate being able to have objects from different countries, cultures, and time periods with which to compare techniques and appearance:

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“The diversity is what struck me.”

“There's some similarities between the cultures. I'm intrigued by that. These people that have developed in various parts of the world have still common themes or pieces of art that remind of things I've seen in other exhibits.”

A few participants mentioned that they were *personally drawn to something* (13%, n=30) in the visible storage gallery:

“I'm very interested in the subject in general and it's close to home, too, and I haven't seen much of the First Nations cultural pieces.”

“The masks had a strong impact on me as well. I have a master's in minority cultures and how they're influenced by American pop media...”

Similarly to other questions, some participants mentioned *the amount of objects* (13%, n=30) when asked what they found interesting:

“There's a lot more to see here...more to see than in museums...instead of just individual pieces, sort of everything.”

“The sheer quantity of things to look and learn about.”

A fifth of participants (20%, n=30) gave other responses to the question:

“Taiwanese exhibit.”

“Confused...thought everything was for sale at first, then realized they were objects.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

2. In what ways do visitors understand the purpose and importance of visible storage in museums?

To see what participants understand about the role of visible storage in museums, study participants were asked three interview questions: 1) What do you think the purpose of the gallery is? 2) On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all and 7 is extremely, how important do you think it is to make more of the collection visible? and 3) If you had to guess, what percentage of the museum's total collection do you think is on display at any given time – not in the gallery, but in the museum overall?

Responses to the interview question about what they think is the purpose of visible storage were coded into four emergent categories: 1) Educational/Showcase history and cultures; 2) Show variety; 3) For the museum to show more; and 4) Other.

Approximately two-thirds of study participants (63%, n=30) said the purpose of the visible storage was for *education or to highlight history and different cultures*:

“So much history to introduce to other people.”

“Show the diverse indigenous cultures of the world and the similarities between them all.”

One third of participants (33%, n=30) said *showing variety and comparisons* was the purpose behind the gallery:

“You can see similarities and differences around the world.”

“Shows variations of cultures and things.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

One third of participants (33%, n=30) also said that the purpose of the visible storage gallery is for *museums to display more objects*:

“So much stuff, they have to show it.”

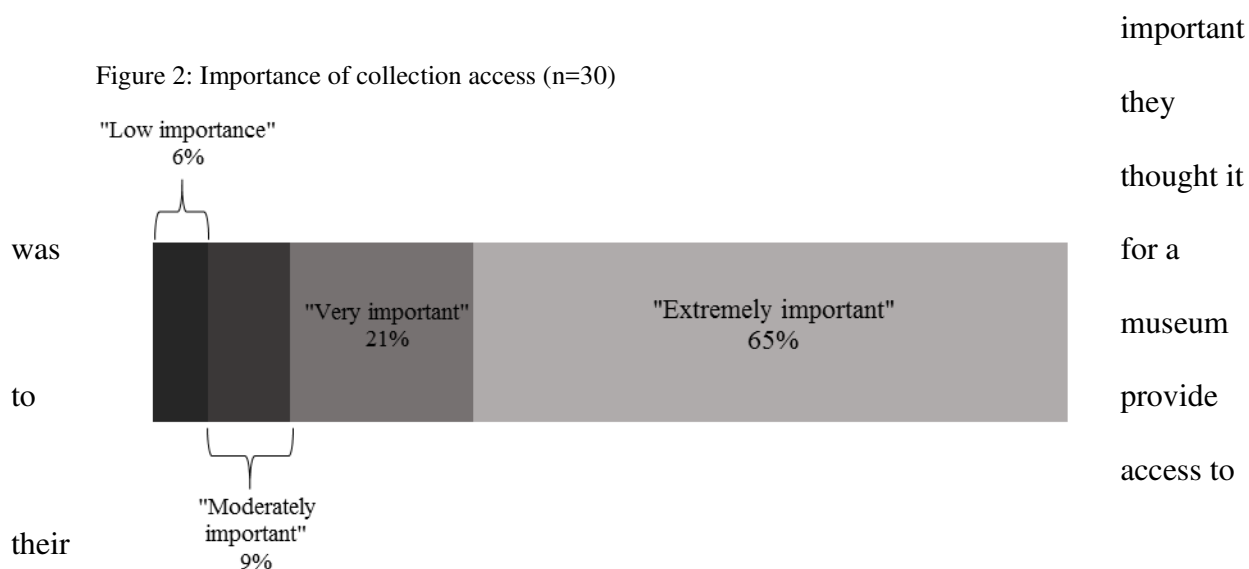
“To show you items you wouldn't usually see...I'm guessing most of this in museums is usually packed away.”

A few participants (20%, n=30) provided other responses to the question:

“Not sure.”

“I don't know what was going through their minds, *laughs*”

After answering this question, study participants were informed that one of the purposes of visible storage is to increase access to more of a museum's collection, and asked how



collections (on a scale of 1-7, where 1=not at all and 7=completely). Most visitors (65%, n=30) believe that it is extremely important for museums to provide access to collections.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Participants were also asked to explain their ratings. Those responses were coded into seven emergent categories: 1) Why store things?; 2) Educational value; 3) Understanding/awareness; 4) Accessible/appeals to more people; 5) Difficult/no way to show everything; 6) More objects, the better; 7) Other.

Over a fourth of participants (27%, n=30) asked why *museums would store things* when no one will be able to see them. A few people said *the more objects the better*:

“What else is a museum for? That’s part of why they’re there. What good is a museum with a bunch of stuff locked up?”

“It was a little overwhelming because of the sheer amount of things but there's no point in keeping things locked up and hidden away.”

“It's important in the short term to undo the reputation museums have as places where things end up and no one sees it. It's important to change that perception but the more they put out and rotate the better.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

About a quarter of study participants (23%, n=30) said it was important to provide access to collections for *education reasons*, and about a quarter (23%, n=30) said it was important for *understanding and awareness*:

“You need more detail to know people and this is to know people so you need this detail. So these collections help you know more about the people.”

“Because museums are part of culture and people need to [know] where they are from and where they are going, so it’s important to have access to this kind of thing.”

One fifth of participants (20%, n=30) said that it is important to have this access because *it appeals to/becomes accessible to more people*:

“Something I see I liked it more and someone can see something else, it’s not like there's just 5 pieces...the more pieces the more people will come to see them and find them interesting.”

“I think representativeness is fine for the public and cataloguing for research is important. So it needs to be quickly accessible for people trying to use it for a purpose.”

A few participants (13%, n=30) highlighted the fact that it is very *difficult for museums to show all of their objects*:

“While it is important, it is also impossible. I'm thinking of the mounds of bird carcasses in biodiversity museums and you often have many of the same thing or too many to display.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“Well you have to put everything on display, it's hard to do. I get that.”

A fifth of participants provided other answers to the question:

“The light is very low, makes it hard to see the things.”

“That’s important.”

Finally, study participants were asked to guess what percentage of the museum’s collection is on display in the entire museum. (Note: The Museum of Anthropology currently has 20% of their collection on display at any given time (which is less than it was prior to their 2010 renovation). Participants (n= 37) provided a range of answers stating that the museum has 2% to 80% of their collection on display. The median percentage suggested was 40%. Just about 38% of participants guessed within 10% (lower and higher) of 20% which means the majority of participants overestimated how many objects were on display (only 2 participants underestimated).

Table 2: Percent of collection on display at any time (n=37)

Percent believed to be on display	Percent of responses
0%-20%	14%
21%-40%	39%
41%-60%	31%
61%-80%	17%

3. In what ways do visible storage methods affect participants’ museum experience?

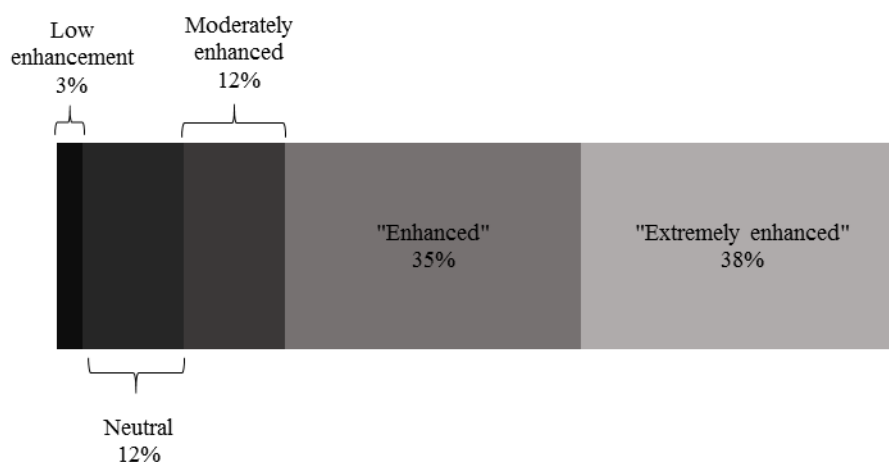
Study participants were asked two interview questions to measure how their visible storage experience may have affected their larger museum experience: 1) Had you heard about the gallery before this visit? and 2) To what extent did the visible storage gallery enhance your museum experience?

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Participants were asked whether or not they had heard about the visible storage space before their visit in order to understand if it was something they already knew about and/or had planned to see. The majority of study participants (60%, n=30) had not heard of the visible storage gallery before visiting. The remaining participants (40%, n=30) said they were aware of it; most of them knew of it because they had been there before.

At the end of the interview, participants were asked how much their visit to the visible storage gallery enhanced their experience. Participants (n=34) were asked to rate this enhancement on a 7 point Likert scale (7-Extremely enhanced, 1-Did not enhance at all).

Figure 4: Rate how much the gallery enhanced your experience (n=34)



Additional responses were coded into six categories: 1) General comments; 2) Amount of stuff lets us see more; 3) Amount of stuff can result in museum fatigue; 4) Not applicable/can't answer; 5) Liked the content; and 6) Amount of stuff lets us see more and slow down.

Just under a third (32%, n=34) of the participants (some interviews had more than person respond to this question) made *general comments* about how the exhibit enhanced their visit:

“It was great. I liked reading the placards.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

“This was not interesting to me, I’ve seen that many times so the other parts were better.”

About a quarter (24%, n=34) of the participants said the exhibit enhanced their visit because *the amount of stuff allowed them to see and experience more objects.*

“It gave us the opportunity to see more things but the level of information in there is a really nice medium between seeing a lot of things and providing just enough context.”

“There’s so much poured into everything in there, it’s really incredible and it’s great that it is able to be seen and appreciated.”

Almost a fifth (18%, n=34) of participants took a different approach in describing how the amount of objects affected their visit. These participants said the *amount of objects in the exhibit can cause museum fatigue.*

“Too much for me to adsorb. I get distracted too easily. Too much. It’s like shopping...for a guy.”

“Well, I came here after the other ones but I was tired. If I had come first, it [my rating] would have been higher.”

Close to a fifth (18%, n=34) of participants *were not able to answer the question.* Quite a few participants visited the visible storage gallery first so they did not feel that they could judge how much the space enhanced their visit.

“It’s kinda the only one we’ve been in so far, so...”

“Not sure, this is the only thing we’ve seen so far.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

About a tenth (9%, n=34) of participants said the space enhanced their visit because they *liked or were interested in the content*.

“Gives you history into the culture.”

“Wasn’t expecting it, I focused on the native peoples sections.”

A few people (6%, n=34) also commented on the amount of objects but also highlighted the fact that *the amount of objects forced them to slow down*.

“It’s a great set up and you can leisurely walk through. There’s no start and finish, it’s nice to go back to where I want.”

“It makes you slow down to take information in.”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. While the concept of visible storage is a popular method for museums to increase collections access (Keene, 2008), there has been little research done on the effect it has on visitors and on what visitors take away from the experience (Gardner, 2007). Data for this study was collected by interviewing 30 visitors at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC and analyzed by coding the themes that emerged.

Conclusions

Results from this study suggested that visible storage (in this case, high density cases as used at the Museum of Anthropology) tends to yield positive reactions from visitors. Even participants who did not know about the space before visiting found the gallery to be a positive addition to their visit. Similar to results from a study conducted at the Field Museum, visitors in this study were unaware of the existence of this exhibit space or had never thought about what kind of access the visible storage was creating for them prior to being interviewed. Visitors tended to not think about what goes on behind the scenes unless they are asked about their opinions on it or unless information was just given to them (Gyllenhaal et al., 1996). Visitors also tended to “stumble in and enjoy [visible storage]” (Bohlen, 2001, p. 2) more often than they planned specifically to visit a visible storage space.

Participants of this study appeared to enjoy visible storage but at the same time were overwhelmed by the displays. A decent portion of participants commented on how many objects were in the space but spoke about it positively. Even when participants described the space as overwhelming, they tended to talk about the exhibit positively. When it comes to reactions to visible storage itself, there were conflicting generalities made in the existing literature. Some

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

museum professionals argued that visitors respond positively to behind-the-scenes opportunities (Matassa, 2010), while other visitors studies suggested that visitors may not fully understand or appreciate what visible storage is (Slater, 1995) and may feel overwhelmed by the displays (Caesar, 2007). However, there is no reason why these studies have to be contradictions as is shown by this study.

The pull-out drawers in the Museum of Anthropology's visible storage gallery were commented on frequently by study participants as was the layout and organization of the gallery. Both of these aspects came up so often that one could possibly argue that by addressing these two concerns that appear in the literature (lack of interactivity and mundane organization), the Museum of Anthropology created a visible storage space that yields positive reactions from their visitors. One of the questions Caesar (2007) posed at the end of her study was "does interpretation create added value from a public perspective, or is it sufficient for them to be able to simply view the collection" (p. 17).

Looking more closely at the reasons people may not understand or enjoy visible storage can also be tied to the "interactivity" aspect. Suzanne Keene's 2008 study explained that visitors would be confused because it looks like a typical exhibit but a visitor's role in the space is not always clear. Typically, museums that utilize dense typological displays are less engaging to visitors (Keene, 2008). While the Museum of Anthropology visible storage gallery is organized by type of object, it is also organized into other categories such as region and time period. A more varied approach to organization may have prevented some of the negative feelings towards visible storage that other types of visible storage might face. Steven Miller also described visible storage areas as lacking in opportunity for visitor interaction. He continued to express his hope for museums to create more opportunities for interaction in these types of spaces to further

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

enhance them and make the collections more accessible (for example, by providing access to catalog information for more in-depth research) (Institute of Museum Ethics, 2009).

The results from this study suggested that visitors may leave a visible storage space understanding that this is a way for museums to showcase their collection. The literature describes mixed findings on what visitors understand about visible storage. Caesar (2007) found the visitors saw storage tours as a way to see “objects that would not necessarily be displayed for various reasons” (p. 5). Matassa (2010) suggests that visitors “inevitably enjoy the behind-the-scenes glimpses of objects” (p. 118). Gardner (2007) found that some people do not find it necessary for museums to provide access like this while it is assumed by the field that greater access is seen as being important (Kelly, 1999). In addition, results from this study fill a gap in the literature by addressing the potential educational aspects of visible storage. Most participants in this study actually alluded to the educational benefit they got *because* of the sheer amount of objects on display. It was not necessarily the amount of objects or the fact that they get to see more of the museum’s collection. It was that they were able to see more of a culture different than their own and get greater exposure to the rest of the world. These thoughts actually line up partially with what the Museum of Anthropology intended. According to interviews conducted by Ahrens (2010), MoA did not have a specific message they wished to convey and let the community members decide what messages were to come across. One community written label in this exhibit acknowledged that they had a museum who wanted to share their culture with the world.

This study also gave credence to the majority of participants in Gardner’s study (2007) who believed that museums should increase access to their collections. The majority of participants in this study said that increasing access to collections is important for museums

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

because they didn't see why museums should "hide stuff away." This seems to be the general assumption in the literature but is measured by professional opinion or perhaps by how object donations may increase (Thistle, 1994). This idea may also explain why so many participants in this study overestimated how many objects were on display. Gyllenhaal et al. (1996) found that visitors also overestimated how much was on display and this could be explained by the fact that visitors expected the museum to be exhibits-focused. As described by Gyllenhaal, "if the reason to have stuff is to display it to the public, it would seem logical to exhibit as much as possible rather than hiding it behind-the-scenes" (p. 6-7).

Even though visitors may not think about what goes on behind-the-scenes in a museum, they can become interested in it as part of their visit, much like the participants in the study at the Field Museum (Gyllenhaal et al., 1996). Most participants in this study did not know about the visible storage before coming to the museum and may not have thought about collections access before being interviewed. Once asked, participants expressed that their time in the visible storage gallery did enhance their overall museum experience.

Implications

Caesar (2007), Gardner (2007), and Kelly (1999) all agree that understanding what visitors think of collections access and visible storage is an important question with not much of an answer. This study attempted to start answering this question, but there can be more research done in a variety of museums using different ways to increase collections access. On the opposite end, a focus on museums *without* any forms of visible storage might yield insight to what visitors think collections access even is and what it looks like to them. Looking at the trend in this study of participants talking about the quantity of objects could also become a useful study. Taking

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

apart the reasoning behind having access to so many objects could get to the root behind why visitors may or may not want increased access to collections.

Understanding what people experience when visiting a museum is helpful in making a museum better for their visitors. Proudlove (2001) makes an important point when it comes to a museum's visitors:

“It should not be assumed that museum audiences demand any particular type of access to collections. The needs of all current and potential users should be investigated before investing in facilities which may prove expensive to maintain” (p. 1).

Results from this study can help museum professionals start to think about what their visitors are getting out of whichever type of visible storage method they are using. Creating visible storage is not an easy or cheap process—understanding if it is something visitors are interested in can be beneficial and helpful in making decisions on how to increase collections access. The question “what do visitors want” comes up in the literature often and is often overlooked. This study will hopefully start a conversation to find ways to answer that question.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

References

- AASLH. (2012). Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics.
- AEA. (2004). American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles of Evaluators.
- Adams, L. A. (2013). Research Ethics. Retrieved from
<https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/resrch.html>
- Ahrens, K. E. (2010). Democratizing Museums through Access in Visible Storage Galleries.
 (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Washington.
- Bohlen, C. (2001, May 8). Museums as Walk-In Closets; Visible Storage Opens Troves to the Public.
The New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/08/arts/museums-as-walk-in-closets-visible-storage-opens-troves-to-the-public.html>
- Caesar, L. G. (2007). Store Tours: Accessing Museums' Stored Collections. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 18(S1), 3–19. Retrieved from <http://www.pia-journal.co.uk/article/view/pia.286/334>
- Characteristics of Excellence. (n.d.). Retrieved November 16, 2015, from <http://www.aamus.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/characteristics-of-excellence>
- CollectionsConversations.pdf. (n.d.).
- Drake, A. E. (2009, October 23). Making Collections Accessible. Retrieved from
<https://cgpmuseummatters.wordpress.com/2009/10/23/making-collections-accessible/>
- The Economist. (2012). Science and technology: Behind the scenes at the museum. Retrieved from
<http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/224071458?accountid=14784>
- Gardner, L. (2007). The Uses of Stored Collections in some London Museums. Institute of Archaeology.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

- George, S. B. (2015, August). The “Stuff” of Museums: Collections, Interactivity, and a Call to Action. *Dimensions*.
- Gyllenhaal, E. D., Perry, D., & Forland, E. (1996). Visitor understandings about research.
- Keene, S. (2005). *Fragments of the world: uses of museum collections* (1st ed). Amsterdam ; Boston: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kelly, L. (1999). Developing access to collections through assessing user needs. In *Museums Australia Conference, Albury*. Available online at [http://www. amonline. net. au/amarc](http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc).
- Korn, R. (2012). *Audience Research: Visitor Experience Study*. Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. Logan Museum of Anthropology. Visible Storage. Retrieved from https://www.beloit.edu/logan/exhibitions/visible_storage/
- Matassa, F. (2010). Active Collections: Rev-Visiting Our Collection for More and Better Use. In S. Pettersson & F. Bergevoet (Eds.), *Encouraging collections mobility: a way forward for museums in Europe*. Helsinki; Amsterdam; Berlin: Finnish National Gallery ; Erfgoed Nederland ; Institut für Museumsforschung.
- Mayer, C. E. (2001). Changing Permanent Exhibitions: An Exercise in Hindsight, Foresight, and Insight1. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 44(4), 378–400. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2001.tb01177.x/abstract>
- Museum Matters 2009 blog.pdf. (n.d.).
- NPS Uses of Collections.pdf. (n.d.).
- Pes, J. (2002). Open storage special: reserve judgement. *Museum Practice*, (19), 62–64.
- Proudlove, C. (2001). Giving visitors access to objects. *Museum Practive*, (18), 46–48.
- Shelton, A., & Miller, S. (2009, September 15). Open Storage Q&A [Q&A Blog Session].

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

- Thistle, P. C. (1994). Visible Storage in Small Museums. In S. J. Knell, *Care of collections* (pp. 207–217). London; New York: Routledge. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10164763>
- Visible Storage. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/visible-storage/>
- Weil, S. E. (2002). *Making museums matter*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Wickell, C. (2014). Great expectations: Researching usability of online museum collections (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Washington. Retrieved May 11, 2016, from https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/26790/Wickell_washingt_on_02500_13338.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- Wilkinson, H. (2005). *Collections for the future: report of a Museums Association inquiry*. London: Museums Association.
- Yellowstone Art Museum. Visible Vault. Retrieved from <http://www.artmuseum.org/collections/visible-vault/>

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Appendix A: Interview Guide**Understanding Visitor Perception of Visible Storage Methods
Interview Guide**

Sena Dawes // Phone: 803-463-8990// Email: dawess2@uw.edu
 Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jessica Luke, Museology Graduate Program, University of Washington
 Phone: 206.685.3496 // Email: jjluke@uw.edu

Consent Script

I am asking you to participate in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this research study is to understand public perceptions of visible storage methods in museums. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time. This interview will be recorded. However, your responses will be confidential. Your name will not be identified and while I may quote you, that quote will not be attributed to you. If you have any questions now or in the future, you may contact me or my advisor using the contact information on the card I shared with you.

Interview Questions

1. Why did you come to the museum today?
 - a. Have you visited the museum before? Yes No
 - i. About how many times (in the last 2 years)? _____
 - ii. Could I ask who you are visiting with today? Alone Adult Group Adults + Children
2. (*I mentioned I was studying the museum's Multiversity Gallery, did you spend any time there?*)What do you think about the Multiversity Gallery?
3. What is the first thing you noticed about the Multiversity Gallery?
 - What about it do you think got your attention?
4. How would you describe it to someone who hadn't seen it before?
5. What's most interesting to you about the Multiversity Gallery?
 - Why is that most interesting?
6. Did you know about the Multiversity Gallery before you came to the museum today?
 - If so, what had you heard about it?

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

7. What do you think the purpose of the Multiversity Gallery is? Why do you think the museum has the Multiversity Gallery?
8. So, one of the intended purposes is to increase the public's access to the museum's collection, to make more of the collection visible. On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all and 7 is extremely, how important do you think it is to make more of the collection visible?
 - Explain your rating.
9. If you had to guess, what percentage of the museum's total collection do you think is on display at any given time – not in the Multiversity Gallery but in the museum overall?
 - What makes you think that?
10. On a scale from 1-7 (1-Not at all and 7- Completely) how much did the Multiversity Gallery enhance your overall museum experience?
 - Explain your rating.

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

Appendix B: Analysis Codebook

“Why did you come to the museum today?”	
Leisure/Landmark destination	“Visiting from out of town, hear it’s a wonderful place
Like this museum	“We’ve been here lots of times over the years”
Practical reasons	“My daughter has a high school project and it includes visiting a museum online or in person”
Professional/hobby interest	“We do something cultural once a month and this month we decided on here”
Other	“Met up with some friends or a friend and they said they were going to drop us off here”
“Have you been here before?”	
“Who are you here with today?”	
“What did you think of the gallery?”	
Comment on the quantity of objects	“Overwhelming, hard to take it all in, so many objects...”
Comment on specific component of the visible storage space	“I liked the drawers and the interactivity of it.”
General reactions	“Beautiful, really big, so much stuff, needed 4 or 5 hours to go through everything...”
Specific reactions to the physical space	“I liked that everything was right next to each other.”
Other	“It’s a multicultural world so we should learn what’s going on in past generations of different cultures”
“What was the first thing you noticed?”	
Look of the space	“Very calm space. Quiet”
Specific object/aspect	“I was looking forward to the masks”
Variety/Quantity of objects	“The differences between cultural artifacts”
Other	“Took a picture of the crocodile display that didn’t start until March outside the museum.”
“How would you describe this space to someone who has never been here before?”	
Come with a plan	“Come fresh, don’t come tired and with lots of time and don’t rush through, stop and look at it and think about what you’re seeing”
Hands on/interactive	“I love opening drawers, just amazing!”
Look of the space	“Dense, multilayered. Thought provoking. Lots of

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

	different things going on in a small scale but lots happening”
Multicultural	“Very detailed, lot of different stuff from all over the world”
Organization/Layout	“Lots in it, well laid out, not cluttered, east to see everything.”
Quantity of objects	“Lots of objects on display”
Other	“It’s unique”
“What was most interesting about the space?”	
Comparisons/variety	“The masks, the jewelry. Just seeing the variations between different cultures.”
Personally drawn to	“The First Nations ceremonial masks. I’m very interested in the subject in general and it’s close to home...”
Quantity of objects	“The sheer quantity of things to look and learn about”
Specific object	“I was struck by these two woven figures with shells for eyes...”
Specific theme	“The functional items; the clothing, the tools, the serving items...”
Other	“Taiwanese exhibit”
“Did you know about the gallery before coming here today?”	
“What do you think the purpose of this gallery is?”	
Educational/Showcase culture	“So much history to introduce to other people”
For museum to display more	“It’s a chance to show lots of things to people, in lots of museums most of the stuff is stored away and never seen”
Show variety/comparisons	“To share similarities across cultures (and differences)”
Other	“I don’t know what was going through their minds, ha ha”
“Rate the importance of collections access and why.”	
Accessible/appeals to more people	“The chance of finding something you’re interested in is higher in a space like this”
Difficult/No way to show everything	“While it is important, it is also impossible. I’m thinking of the mounds of bird carcasses in biodeversity museums and you often have many of the same thing or too many to display”
Educational value	“You need more detail to know people...so these collections help you know more about people”

VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF VISBLE STORAGE METHODS

The more objects, the better	"It's important...to undo the reputation museums have as places where things end up and no one sees it. It's important to change that perception by the more they put out and rotate the better"
Understanding/awareness	"I think people need more exposure to past and present culture because it broadens our minds and lets us understand were we come from and where others come from"
Why store things?	"What else is a museum for? That's part of why they're there. What good is a museum with a bunch of stuff locked up?"
Other	"Feasibility. I think it's a good thing, I appreciate some curation which to my mind seems the opposite of this strategy..."
"What percentage of the collection is on display?"	
"How much did this enhance your experience? Why?"	
Amount of stuff allows us to see/experience more	"There's a thousand things in there and some of which I've never seen before and everytime I see or learn something new is a new experience for me"
Amount of stuff allows us to see/experience more (and slow down)	"It's a great set up and you can leisurely walk through"
Amount of stuff can result in museum fatigue	"Well, I can here after the other ones but I was tired. If I had come here first it [my rating] would have been higher"
General comment	"I came here to see the bigger items but this was wonderful"
Liked the content	"Quite a bit"
Not applicable/can't answer	"Not sure, this is the only thing we've seen so far"