

**A Research Study to Better Understand Latino Visitors' Feelings of Belonging
During a Museum Visit**

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Abstract

The Latino population of the United States is steadily increasing. In the near future, research shows that the country could even become a minority majority, where non-white citizens are the largest demographic. While today there are millions of Latinos in the U.S., museum visitor demographics still indicate that the majority of museum visitors identify as white/Caucasian. Research shows that there are numerous barriers for Latino museum visitation, such as a lack of Spanish translation and labels, lack of diverse museum staff, and a lack of culturally representative exhibit content and programming. The purpose of this research study was to better understand Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during their museum visit. The study employed a descriptive survey design using semi-structured interviews conducted at three large museums in the U.S. A total of 82 individuals were interviewed. Results showed that participants indicated moderate to low feelings of place-belonging, people-fit belonging, and context-belonging. Results also showed that participants' feelings of belonging were affected by the presence of culturally relevant content in the museum, as well as by content available in the Spanish language. This study provides museum staff and professionals with opportunities to engage with growing Latino audiences and encourage Latino visitation to their institutions.

Introduction

As of 2021, about twenty percent of the entire United States' population – a melting pot of identities, beliefs, cultures and livelihoods – identify as Latino (DATOS Arizona, 2021). The U.S. Latino population is growing steadily year by year and is expected to more than double by 2060 (DATOS Arizona, 2021). Yet, few Latinos visit museums (Ferrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Salazar, 2013; Strube, 2024). A 2023 survey suggests that Latinos make up less than 9% of US museum visitors (Munoz, 2024).

It is increasingly important that we work to better understand why Latino museum visitation is disproportionate to the growing national Latino population, and what barriers are in place that prevent Latinos from visiting museums. Research shows that people of color do not visit museums for various reasons, including a perception of museums as predominantly white spaces, a lack of representation in exhibits and staff, socioeconomic barriers, a lack of culturally relevant content, and feelings of exclusion leading to a sense of not being welcomed or understood within the museum environment (Price & Applebaum, 2022). This article describes a research study designed to better understand Latino museum visitors' feelings of belonging during a museum visit.

A Growing Latino Population on a National Scale

According to Wilder (2024), a demographer who studies population growth at the United States Census Bureau, the Latino population is expanding at a substantially faster rate than any other non-Latino population in the country. Research shows that in 2023, the Latino population accounted for over 70% of the overall U.S. population growth (United States Census Bureau, 2024). This statistic was also mirrored in findings by DATOS (2021), an organization that researches the state of Arizona's Hispanic market. DATOS stated that between the years 2010-

2021, Latino population growth far exceeded that of any other race/ethnicity. Therefore, within the last decade, the U.S. Latino population has steadily increased and continues to do so.

The U.S. Latino population makes up about 20% of the total national population and surpassed 65,000,000 people in 2023. This growth is due in part to international migration – which the U.S. Census Bureau stated contributed to one third of Latino population net gain – but is mainly due to natural birth and death records. Latinos in the U.S. can be characterized as being a “young and diverse demographic” (Coral et al., 2024, para. 4). Research shows that one in four children under 18 in the U.S. identifies as Latino. Latinos are also considered to be one of the most heterogeneous demographic groups in the country, with diverse origins spanning North and South America, Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. In respect to self-identifying terms such as Latino and Hispanic which are most commonly used, other terms such as Latine, Latinx, Afro-Latino/a and Chicano/a are also common.

Who Visits Museums?

According to an Annual Survey of U.S. Museum-Goer Demographics (2024) collected by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), 84% of frequent museum goers identify as white. Museum visitor demographics have been unchanging for the past several years, which can be seen both from past AAM survey reports which reflect similar yearly data, as well as research conducted by groups such as the American Association of Museums who have data showing that in 2008 the majority of museum visitors also identified as white. Research shows that although the U.S. Latino population is continuously growing, museum visitor demographics remain majority-white and not reflective of this minority population growth (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). For its entire history, the United States has been a “majority-white nation” (Coral et al., 2024, para. 1). Today, with the steady increase of the U.S. Latino population and that of other

groups such as African Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Strube, 2024) the United States is moving toward having a majority minority population as soon as 2050. With this data in mind, it brings to question the impact that this will have on all museum institutions and whether or not museum visitor demographics will be reflective of this change.

Understanding Barriers for Latino Museum Visitation

Latinos in the United States do not visit museums as often as other groups and it is important to understand why (Strube, 2024). Based on current research and literature, three main barriers for Latino museum visitation have been isolated for further discussion. Research shows that Latino museum visitors believe that a) museum staff and personnel are not diverse nor reflective of their own identities, b) museum content contains language barriers, and c) museums lack cultural representation in their overall exhibit content and programming (Acevedo & Madara, 2015; Aldaba et al., 2021; Eusebio, 2017; Garibay et al. 2015; Maldonado & Nguyen, 2020).

Museum Staff and a Lack of Diversity

As of 2015, over 80% of all leadership positions in museums were held by white employees (Sweeney et al., 2022). In a 2022 survey conducted by the Mellon Foundation, AAM, and Ithaka S+R, data were collected from 328 museums in North America concerning the status of museum staff diversity and racial demographics. They found that there was a “moderate increase in people of color (POC) across all museum roles” (p. 4) as compared to a previously conducted survey in 2014. The collected data showed that museum leadership and conservation roles, despite claims of them growing more diverse, had not exceeded more than one-fifth POC representation. In addition, most of the staff representation by Latino personnel remained in “people-facing positions” which were “low paying and [had] the lowest retention” (p. 5).

Anderson and Mileham (2020) emphasized that museum professionals “do not necessarily reflect the diversity of the United States.” (p. 598).

In 2021, the American Alliance of Museum’s Latino Network Task Force (2021) created a guide for museums titled “Strategies for Engaging and Representing Latinos in Museums.” This guide, a culmination of published literature and conversations with other task force members and museum practitioners, was made available in the hope of inspiring further Latino engagement, collaboration, and representation. Their collected research and analysis also showed that “the most important thing in making Latino audiences feel at home in a museum is Latino staff” (p. 58). In addition, AAM’s 2010 study titled “Demographic Changes and the Future of Museums” found that Latino visitors have “very strong expectations that museums should include a diverse staff” (p.14). Salazar, a Latina and the Latino Cultural Programs Coordinator at the Denver Art Museum (DAM) stated that “there will be little choice but to make sure the staff reflects the make-up of the community” in reference to the success of her Latino-focused work and her creation of culturally relevant and engaging programs for Denver’s Latino community (para. 8). Salazar is just one example of how Latinos in museum leadership roles impact overall Latino representation and visitation to the museum.

Language Barriers in the Museum

Museums have “arguably been slower to recognize and identify strategies for including multilingual audiences” (Garibay et al., 2015, p. 2). Research shows that 75% of all U.S. Latinos are able to carry a conversation in Spanish and that 40 million Latinos speak Spanish while at home (Lilley, 2023). This is an incredibly large population of bilingual individuals who are potentially not being linguistically represented and welcomed into institutions such as museums. In 2015, a study conducted by Contemporanea, an audience agency consulting practice, gathered

data from an online survey they published in California in the hopes of better understanding Latino experiences in museums. Of the collected data, language accessibility and the lack of Spanish signage, advertising, on-site Spanish-language services, and active bilingual staff were at the forefront of barriers preventing frequent Latino visitation to museums (Acevedo & Madara, 2015). The study's findings also suggested that Latino museum visitors wanted Spanish represented in the museum not only for wider comprehension for Spanish-dominant family members, but also for a more individualized emotional and cultural connection to the institution and its content. Acevedo and Madara stated that "museums can immediately leverage the use of Spanish-language communications in marketing and interpretation to signal inclusion and cultural relevance to Latinos" (p. 2). The American Alliance of Museum's 2021 study also found that Spanish-language and bilingual content is actively sought out by Latino consumers on various platforms ranging from printed materials to radio and may influence Latino visitation to an institution. They found that bilingual materials can provide emotional connections, such as encouraging feelings of comfort and value in the institution, and practical connections, such as providing access to content, helping those learning another language, and providing platforms for adults to facilitate learning for their children (Aldaba et al., 2021).

Cultural Representation

Cultural representation can be defined as an individual's cultural heritage being represented in mainstream culture (Olivares & Piatak, 2021). In the context of the museum, cultural representation is cultural heritage being displayed in museum collections, exhibit content, and visitor programming. For Latino museum visitors who feel like they have not been represented in museums in the past, cultural representation and a lack thereof is a large barrier to overcome when visiting museums. Research shows that a large motivation for most Latinos to

visit museums are exhibits and programs that showcase their own cultural heritage (Acevedo & Madara, 2015; Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Olivares & Piatak, 2021). Studies also show that Latinos want to be a part of the overall narrative of the museum rather than a one-time singular “Latino exhibit” (Aldaba et al., 2021). Historically, museums have been characterized as places that make some cultures visible and others invisible (Olivares & Piatak, 2021). Members of the American Alliance of Museum’s Latino Network Task Force emphasized that museum staff should evaluate their current collections and exhibits to see if they contain Latino objects, if Latino stories are being displayed in permanent galleries, and if such content is easily accessible for all audiences (2021). Through this evaluative work, museums can pinpoint what needs to be done to further diversify their collections, exhibits, and programs so as to prevent the exclusion of POC stories and histories.

Latinos are a very diverse demographic and past studies reflect that they value partnership and collaboration with museum staff in order to create exhibits and programs that appeal to all Latino audiences (Aldaba et al., 2021). A study of the Latino experience in museums conducted by Contemporanea (2015) found that Latinos are more interested in visiting museums when there are exhibits pertaining to their own culture, with Día de Muertos exhibits being mentioned most often. Contemporanea found that museums that culturally represent Latinos through exhibits and programs provide a “validation and reinforcement of the importance of that heritage” (p. 4) which allow Latino visitors to connect to the museum through representation of their traditions and heritage, and encourage feelings of nostalgia and the desire to pass on such traditions to their children. Contemporanea also found that Latino visitors felt resentment when museums only culturally represented them through one-time Latino-specific programs or exhibits which enforced the importance for relationship building and collaboration

with Latino communities in the creation of permanent or ongoing Latino-focused museum content (p. 4). Overall, museums create incentive for Latino visitation when they show active participation in the creation of culturally representative exhibits and programs and in the active evaluation of their Latino community and what those community members hope to experience within their institution now and in the future.

The above examples offer insight into the current research conducted to understand what barriers exist for Latino visitors to museums. This study aims to provide additional research from which to deepen that understanding so that museums may create successful changes to encourage larger percentages of Latino visitors to their institutions.

Belonging

Belonging is considered to be a fundamental human need (Allen, 2021). To define “belonging” is quite difficult. It is considered multidimensional and ill-theorized (Antonsich, 2010), it can be a noun, or a verb, something often without an object (McLeod, 2018), and is associated “with all manner of things” (Allen, 2021, p. 3). For the purposes of this article, belonging is defined as feeling attached, valued, included, and having a sense of “insiderness and proximity to people, activities, networks and spaces” (Hall, 2010, p. 56).

Belonging in the Museum

Museums have the potential to be spaces that foster feelings of belonging for all visitors. Museums are defined as being in the service of society in the fostering of diversity, accessibility, and inclusivity (International Council of Museums, 2024). Both the definitions of “museum” and “belonging” have similarities. Museums should potentially be spaces where people feel included, valued, and represented – spaces where people feel like they belong. This potential is not being met as museums are still associated with feelings of exclusion, eurocentrism, and

underrepresentation (English, 2015; Fortune, 2022; Price & Applebaum, 2022). Although museums are still publicly conceived in this way, researchers and museum professionals are collecting data to encourage institution-wide changes. By conducting research to better understand museum visitors' feelings of belonging, institutions are able to usher in change more effectively in the hope of appealing to wider audiences and expelling the belief that they are still exclusionary.

Current research that has been conducted to understand visitors' feelings of belonging during a museum visit emphasize responses based on age, gender, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Female visitors were found to feel higher levels of place-belongingness, defined as an individual's attachment to physical space, historical context, or social environment, than male visitors (Price & Applebaum, 2022). Older museum visitors were recorded as being more likely to feel excluded from museum content and physical spaces as their age increased (Price & Applebaum, 2022). In respect to race/ethnicity, research showed that "guests who identified as white reported higher levels of community belonging than others" (p. 147). Whereas, African American visitors were more likely to feel lower levels of place-belongingness and Asian visitors reported lower levels of inclusion (Price & Applebaum, 2022). Non-white visitors were also found to show lower levels of community belongingness when visiting the museum (Price & Applebaum, 2022). Research shows that Black or African American, Asian, and Latino visitors were "twice as likely to think of their community in terms of race/ethnicity" (p. 153) and felt that their specific communities were not as equally represented or welcomed in the museum (Price & Applebaum, 2022). While non-white visitors may feel equal levels of inclusion and personal agency, not seeing their racial/ethnic communities represented in the museum could affect overall feelings of belonging during their visit. Based on these results, it is reasonable to assume

that Latino visitors also experience greater feelings of exclusion and lower levels of belonging during their museum visit.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during a museum visit. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do Latino museum visitors feel like they belong in museums?
2. What aspects of the museum affect Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during their visit?

Methods

Study Design

This research study employed a descriptive survey design using semi-structured interviews conducted in person at prominent museums in Tucson, AZ and Seattle, WA.

Sampling Strategy

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling at three museums. The museums differed in content, with one focused on art, one focused on the history of aviation and space exploration, and one focused on natural history and culture. The researcher chose to collect data at two museums in Tucson, for two reasons. One, Tucson has a large Latino population. Given that this study focused specifically on Latino visitors' feelings of belonging in museums, it made sense to collect data in a city with a substantial number of Latino residents. Two, the researcher grew up in Tucson and had contacts with various museums in the area. The reason the researcher chose to collect data in Seattle was due to their current enrollment at the University of Washington and their connection to museums in the Puget Sound region. The three institutions

were selected because they had high numbers of visitors, ranging from 70,000 to 600,000 visitors per year, and represented three different types of museums.

Visitors were approached as they were exiting the museum and asked to partake in the study. The data collector introduced herself, described the entire project to the participant, emphasized that all collected data were anonymous, and indicated that she was specifically studying visitors who identify as Latino/Chicano/Hispanic in order to offer museums insight into how to better engage with and represent Latino audiences. Visitors who did not identify as Latino/Chicano/Hispanic were thanked for their time and did not continue with the interview. Those that did identify as Latino/Chicano/Hispanic were asked if they agreed to participate in the study and directed to a place where they could sit down for the interview.

Researcher's Positionality

The researcher would like to acknowledge their standpoint as the granddaughter of first-generation Mexican immigrants and their self-identification as Latina. While the researcher's academic background is in Socio-Cultural Anthropology, the predominant influence on their research is their own cultural identity and dedication to the representation and engagement of Latino audiences. The researcher acknowledges how the intersectionality of their social identities impacts the content of their article. The researcher is also understanding, and in agreement, with the use of Latinx/Latine/Chicanx, and other gender affirming alternatives. However, for the purposes of this article, and due to the prevalent use of the term in referenced literature, the researcher will be using the word "Latino" when referring to people of Latin-American descent.

Description of Sample

A total of 82 adults were interviewed. Of those 82, 78 supplied their date of birth. Forty four percent (n=34) were between 30-50 years of age; 41% (n=32) were between 18-30 years

old; 9% (n=7) were 70 years old or older; and only 6% (n=5) were 50-70 years old. Over half of the participants identified as women (63%, n=52); 32% (n=27) identified as men; 2% (n=2) identified as non-binary, and only one participant identified as transgender. Sixty seven percent (n=55) of participants indicated that they were most proficient in the English language; 22% (n=18) indicated they were most proficient in both Spanish and English; and 11% (n=9) indicated they were most proficient in Spanish. Fifty one percent of participants (n=42) stated that they were visiting the museum with a group of family and/or friends with all adults; 32% (n=26) stated that they were visiting with a group of family and/or friends including children under 18 years of age; 11% (n=9) selected “other”; and only 6% (n=5) of participants stated they were visiting alone.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected between February 13th, 2025 and April 3rd, 2025. Participants were approached outside of the museum entrance/exit and asked a filter question (if they identified as Latino/Chicano/Hispanic) to determine if they met the criteria for the study. If the criteria were met, the participants were asked to sit and take part in the interview. The interviews typically lasted 5-7 minutes in length and were completed in 3 parts: i) Likert Scale questions about their feelings of belonging during their museum visit, adapted from Price and Applebaum (2022); ii) demographic questions; iii) open-ended questions about individual definitions of belonging, moments during their visit they did or did not feel like they belonged, and the community they were thinking about while partaking in the survey (See Appendix A for the interview guide). Parts one and two were completed by hand in the form of a printed survey, and part three was orally recorded for later transcription.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data from each museum was aggregated into a single spreadsheet. The mean was calculated for all participant ratings of the Likert Scale questions, as well as for all subsequent types of belonging: context, place, and people-fit. Interview transcripts were created and edited for clarity through the Otter.Ai online program. Participant responses to the four open-ended questions were analyzed through emergent coding in order to isolate similar themes across all answers. A coding rubric was developed to analyze all qualitative data (See Appendix B).

Results

1) To what extent and in what ways do Latino museum visitors feel like they belong in museums?

Study participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with 25 statements measuring their feelings of belonging during their museum visit. Statements were measured across three categories of belonging a) Context belonging; b) Place belonging; and c) People-Fit belonging (Price & Applebaum, 2022).

a) Context belonging

Price and Applebaum (2022) describe context belonging as a visitor's sense of communal and personal identity. Nine statements were adapted from Price and Applebaum's model of belonging measuring the ways visitors connected to a museum's culture and community in the context of their visit. Participants were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1 to 7, with one being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree." Table 1 shows the mean ratings of each statement for context belonging.

Table 1

Participant ratings for feelings of context belonging during their museum visit (N=82)

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Mean Rating (1-7)</u>
I felt very comfortable at the museum as a person of my gender	6.5
I felt very comfortable at the museum as a person of my race and/or ethnicity	6.3
I could be myself here	6.2
The museum promoted an equal experience for people like me	5.7
My presence here mattered	5.3
I could help others have a better experience at the museum	5.2
By being here I made the museum a better place	5.2
Museum content reflected my community	4.9
Museum guests reflected my community	4.7

b) Place belonging

Place belonging is described as participants' direct connection to a physical space, aspects of a physical space, an environment, a historical legacy, and/or a social environment (Price & Applebaum, 2022). Six statements were adapted from Price and Applebaum to measure a participants' physical or psychological connection to the museum. Participants were asked to rate the statements on a scale from 1 to 7, with one being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree." Table 2 shows the mean ratings of each statement for place belonging.

Table 2

Participant ratings for feelings of place belonging during their museum visit (N=82)

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Mean Rating (1-7)</u>
I was fond of the museum	6.2
I felt connected to the museum	5.8
I felt like I belonged at the museum	5.7
When I was at the museum, I felt a part of it	5.4
The museum made me feel like no other place can	5.1
The museum was designed for me	4.7

c) People-Fit belonging

Finally, Price and Applebaum (2022) describe people-fit belonging as the way an individual is able to fit into a certain space and whether they feel included and welcomed or excluded and isolated. Ten statements were adapted from Price and Applebaum to measure participants' feelings of inclusion and exclusion in the museum. Participants were asked to rate the statements on a scale from 1 to 7, with one being "strongly disagree" and 7 being "strongly agree." Statements outlined in bold contrasted with others in their use of negative language. Participants were asked to rate these statements on the same scale as outlined above. Note that a lower mean rating for bolded statements is a positive result in the people-fit belonging scale. Table 3 shows the mean ratings of each statement for people-fit belonging.

Table 3

Participant ratings for feelings of people-fit belonging during their museum visit (N=82)

Statement	Mean Rating (1-7)
When I was with other guests, I felt included	5.5
I had a sense of belonging at the museum	5.3
I had a place at the table at the museum	5.1
I felt connected with other guests at the museum	4.9
I had bonds with other guests at the museum	4.7
I felt like an outsider at the museum	2.6
When at the museum, I felt like people did not care about me	2.6
When I was with other guests, I felt like a stranger	2.5
I felt I was not included in the activities of others at the museum	2.3
I felt isolated from everyone else at the museum	2.2

2) What aspects of the museum affect Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during their visit?

Forty-two individuals participated in an interview after completing the belonging questionnaire. Interviews asked four open-ended questions. Coding rubrics were created for each one, from which emergent themes were isolated into categories in connection to each individual question.

a) Individual definitions of belonging

Participants were asked what the word belonging meant to them. Responses were coded into 7 emergent categories. Twenty six percent of participants (n=11) described belonging in

connection to community and other peoples or groups. One participant stated, “To me, belonging is a sense of feeling like you are part of some sort of community or some sort of idea or thing. It’s like this feeling of being a part of some group.” Another participant said, “To me [belonging] means like being a part of a group, either a family or like a friend group, like having a connection with someone.”

Twenty three percent of participants (n=10) defined belonging in reference to inclusivity and acceptance. These participants described belonging as “To not be excluded, or otherwise meant to feel different. To be included in an experience” as well as “To feel like you are accepted in the place that you are.”

Seventeen percent of participants (n=7) defined belonging in reference to safety and comfort. For example, one participant described belonging as, “Feeling comfortable within an environment.” Belonging was also described as when “you don’t feel out of place or uncomfortable, you feel safe.” Another 17% (n=7) specifically used the words “part of” in reference to their definition of belonging. For example, participants defined belonging as “to be a part of something”, “to be a part of”, or “being a part of.”

Seven percent of participants (n=3) defined belonging in reference to race or culture. One participant stated that belonging was “being accepted where you are, no matter your race, your culture or any type of background that you may have.” Five percent of participants (n=2) defined belonging in connection to individual purpose and value. Belonging was defined as being “like those around you believe that you add value to any given environment/group” or “like a sense of purpose.” Five percent of participants (n=2) also defined belonging in reference to personal identity and authenticity. One participant stated, “Belonging is feeling like I can be authentically myself.”

b) Moments when visitors felt like they belonged in the museum

Participants were asked if they could describe a moment during their museum visit when they felt like they belonged. Responses were coded into 5 emergent categories. Twenty three percent of participants (n=10) said they experienced moments of belonging while being with or interacting with other guests. One participant said, “I felt like I belonged when seeing so many people.” Another participant gave an example of interacting with another guest when helping to take a photo and said they were both “admiring the scenery.”

Twenty one percent of participants (n=9) said they felt like they belonged when seeing an exhibit but did not mention specific exhibit content or themes. Participants gave examples such as “looking at the art, the self-portraits” or “being inside of the airplanes maybe because I thought it was so cool.”

Nineteen percent of participants (n=8) said they felt like they belonged when seeing Latino exhibit content and/or Latino artists in the museum, seeing other guests in their demographic, and seeing labels in Spanish. For example, one person said they felt like they belonged when “finding museum labels that say an artist is from Latin America!” Other participants said, “I really enjoyed the displays from Mexico” and “I do like when I see, for example, that they have some explanations and signage both in English and Spanish.”

Twelve percent (n=5) stated that they always felt like they belonged during their visit. For example, one participant responded, “[I felt like I belonged] the whole time I was here.”

Five percent of participants (n=2) described moments of belonging that did not fit into the above categories. Participants responded they felt like they belonged when first entering the museum and having easily legible exhibit labels. Five percent of participants (n=2) said they felt like they belonged when visiting a museum space that was outside or in nature. For example, one

person said, “just being with nature, yeah, it was more so out in the wildlife walking area.”

Finally, one participant said they never felt like they belonged in the museum.

c) Moments when visitors felt like they did not belong in the museum

Participants were asked if they could describe a moment during their museum visit when they felt like they did not belong. Over half of the participants (64%, n=27) said they never experienced such a moment. For example, many responded “none” or “none come to mind.” One participant said, “I never felt like I haven’t belonged.”

The remaining responses were coded into 2 emergent categories. Fourteen percent of participants (n=6) said they experienced moments of not-belonging in reference to exhibit content and exhibit spaces. One participant said they didn’t feel like they belonged “in the contemporary area. I don’t know why. I just didn’t feel good there.” Another participant said, “I guess when we were looking at snakes, I felt like I definitely didn’t belong.” Five percent of participants (n=2) said they did not feel like they belonged when in the cafeteria/dining space of the museum. For example, one person said, “I didn’t love the food experience in the cafeteria. Maybe that’s where I felt like I didn’t belong.”

Four participants provided responses that did not fit into the above categories. Participants responded they did not feel like they belonged when they saw labels without Spanish translation, labels with long text passages, no cleared walkways or maps of the museum, and when being surrounded by too many people.

d) Connections to a specific community

Participants were asked if they were thinking of a certain community when answering both the belonging questionnaire and the open-ended interview questions. Responses were coded into 4 emergent categories. Four participants stated that they were not thinking of any specific

community and answered “none” (n=4). Of the remaining responses, 49% (n=19) said they were thinking about the Latino/Hispanic community and/or a minority community. For example, participants stated, “The Latino community” or “The Hispanic community.” Twenty one percent of participants (n=8) said they were thinking about a specific geographic location in reference to a community. Participants stated specific cities or states such as, “Tucson” or “I was thinking Tucson and Arizona.”

Twelve participants said they were thinking about a different group of people, such as family, friends, others their age, the Spanish speaking community, the museum community, or the gay community. For example, participants stated “my family” or “my friends and family” when asked. Others stated, “people aged 16 to 80, so everyone, pretty much except the little kids”, or said “just the community here [the museum] in general.” Participants also said, “the gay community” and “like a Spanish speaking community.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand Latino visitors’ feelings of belonging during a museum visit. Eighty-two interviews were conducted with participants at three museums in the United States which resulted in the key findings outlined below by research question.

1) To what extent and in what ways do Latino museum visitors feel like they belong in museums?

This study expanded upon findings from Price & Applebaum’s (2022) study which focused on developing an instrument to measure feelings of belonging during a museum visit. Price & Applebaum gathered responses from visitors without the use of a filter question or a specific demographic in mind. This study focused explicitly on responses by Latino visitors to

better understand their feelings of belonging. Price & Applebaum found that Asian visitors reported lower levels of inclusion (people-fit belonging), and African American visitors reported lower levels of place-belonging (2022). Based on these findings, it was reasonable to assume that Latino visitors would feel lower levels of inclusion and place-belongingness as well. Their findings were corroborated by the data collected in this study, which showed that participants reported moderate to low feelings of place-belonging and people-fit belonging during their visit. Additionally, Price & Applebaum (2022) found that non-white visitors experienced lower levels of community belongingness (context-belonging) when visiting the museum. This was supported by the findings of this study which reported moderate to low levels of context-belonging in participant responses.

2) What aspects of the museum affect Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during their visit?

For some Latino museum visitors, seeing Latino-focused exhibit content, the representation of Latino artists, labels in Spanish, and other guests in their race/ethnic demographic cultivated positive feelings of belonging during their visit. Participants reported that they felt like they belonged when seeing themselves represented culturally in the museum. However, they also indicated that not seeing themselves culturally represented, such as through a lack of Spanish translated labels in the museum, made them feel as if they did not belong in the museum. These findings were supported through a study conducted by Contemporanea who found that language accessibility and the lack of Spanish signage and advertising were at the forefront of barriers preventing frequent Latino visitation to museums (Acevedo & Madara, 2015). A study conducted by the American Alliance of Museums also found that bilingual

materials could provide emotional connections, such as encouraging feelings of comfort and value in the institution-or positive feelings of belonging (Aldaba et al., 2021).

Research also showed that a large motivation for most Latinos to visit museums were exhibits and programs that showcased their own cultural heritage (Acevedo & Madara, 2015; Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Olivares & Piatak, 2021). A study conducted by Contemporanea indicated that Latinos were more interested in visiting museums when there were exhibits pertaining to their own culture (Acevedo & Madara, 2015), and the study conducted by Price & Applebaum (2022) indicated that not seeing their racial/ethnic communities represented in the museum could affect overall feelings of belonging during their visit. These examples support the study's findings which show that seeing culturally relevant content in museums, specifically exhibits, affected Latino visitors' feelings of belonging.

Price & Applebaum (2022) found that Latino visitors were "twice as likely to think of their community in terms of race/ethnicity" (p. 153). This research was supported by the findings in this study which showed that when asked what community they were thinking about when completing the belonging survey, the majority of participants were thinking about the Latino/Hispanic community. Additionally, when participants were asked to provide personal definitions of the word belonging, many focused on themes such as "community" and "inclusion." When taking into account the importance of community to the survey participants, and the racial/ethnic emphasis placed on participants' centered communities, one can infer that connections to community affect overall feelings of belonging during a museum visit.

Limitations

All interviews were conducted in English which potentially excluded a large subset of the Latino community who were dominantly Spanish speaking. A key finding of this study was

the lack of Spanish translated content and Spanish-speaking staff in the museum and its effect on Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during their visit. By conducting all interviews solely in English, this existing barrier for Latino museum visitation was capitalized upon. The researcher acknowledges how their own personal limitation in not being completely fluent in Spanish, and thus their inability to properly and reliably translate interview questions and participant answers, affected the study. The results of this study should be acknowledged with the understanding that additional interviews by Spanish-speaking Latino visitors could potentially offer greater insight into feelings of belonging during their visit.

Additionally, the study sample was limited in size due to time constraints and the researcher's inability to collect data for more than 2 consecutive days at a specific site. It should also be taken into account that not as many Latinos visit museums as other demographics and as such, the sample size could have been increased if the researcher was on-site for a longer period of time.

Implications

This study provides a better understanding of Latino visitors' feelings of belonging during a museum visit. Results showed that Latinos have moderate to low feelings of place-belonging and inclusion during their visit. It also showed that Latino visitors' feelings of belonging were affected by culturally relevant and bilingual content in the museum.

Research

While this study offered insights into Latino visitors' feelings of belonging, there is plenty of research that could be conducted in the future so as to expand this area of study. One study that could be conducted would be an in-depth qualitative research study on a select number of Latino visitors during their museum visit. The researcher could accompany visitors or single

families during their museum visit, record detailed observations, and conduct in-depth post-visit interviews on how Latino visitors felt at various points during their visit, so as to expand upon existing research. Additionally, this study was conducted at three prominent museums in the Western region of the United States. Future studies could be conducted at museums across the entire country so as to have a better understanding of Latino visitors on a national scale.

Practice

This study's findings are useful and beneficial for museum practice. By better understanding Latino visitors' feelings of belonging, museum staff members in departments such as curation, visitor services, programming, and education can design content with the Latino community in mind so as to promote higher Latino visitation to their institution and higher levels of belonging and inclusion from those visitors. A major finding of this study was the use of bilingual signage and content in the museum and its effect on participants' feelings of belonging. This can inform museum staff that offering their visitors content in both Spanish and English may foster greater feelings of belonging. Additionally, participants stated that seeing their own culture reflected in the museum also affected their feelings of belonging. Museum staff could prioritize content creation centered on Latino culture and history within their institution so as to appeal to a Latino audience. Museum staff may use this study's findings to engage in conversation with Latino community members and create a sustainable relationship of respect, representation, and continual engagement at their institution.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Filter Question: Do you identify as Latino/a, Latine, Latinx, Hispanic and/or Chicano/a?

- If yes, then proceed with the interview

Part 1: Belonging Likert Scale and Demographic Questionnaire

- The participant is handed a clipboard and pen and asked to complete the printed questionnaire.

Part 2: Short Answer Recorded Interview

- The participant is asked if it's okay if their answers are recorded for future transcription and then asked the 4 following questions:
 1. What does the word “belonging” mean to you?
 2. Can you describe a moment during your visit when you felt like you belonged?
 3. Can you describe a moment during your visit when you felt like you did not belong?
 4. What community were you thinking about when you answered all of these questions?

Belonging Likert Scale and Demographic Questionnaire

Below, there are a series of statements. I'd like you to read each one and rate how much you agree with it on a scale from 1 to 7 where **1 is strongly disagree** and **7 is strongly agree**. Take as much time as you need, and if you're unsure of the meaning of any of the statements, feel free to ask.

		Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree
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	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	The museum promoted an equal experience for people like me							
2.	Museum guests reflected my community							
3.	Museum content reflected my community							
4.	I felt very comfortable at the museum as a person of my gender							
5.	I felt very comfortable at the museum as a person of my race and/or ethnicity							
6.	I could be myself here							
7.	I could help others have a better experience at the museum							
8.	By being here I made the museum a better place							
9.	My presence here mattered							
10.	I felt connected to the museum							
11.	When I was at the museum, I felt a part of it							
12.	I felt like I belonged at the museum							

13.	I was fond of the museum							
14.	The museum made me feel like no other place can							
15.	The museum was designed for me							
16.	When I was with other guests, I felt included							
17.	I had bonds with other guests at the museum							
18.	I had a sense of belonging at the museum							
19.	I had a place at the table at the museum							
20.	I felt connected with other guests at the museum							
21.	I felt like an outsider at the museum							
22.	When at the museum, I felt like people did not care about me							
23.	I felt isolated from everyone else at the museum							
24.	When I was with other guests, I felt like a stranger							
25.	I felt I was not included in the activities of others at the museum							

1. Which of these options best describes your gender identity?
 - Woman
 - Man
 - Non-Binary
 - Transgender
 - Prefer to self-describe
2. In what year were you born?
3. In which language are you most proficient?
4. Who are you visiting the museum with today?
 - Alone
 - Group, family and/or friends including children under 18 years
 - Group, family and/or friends with all adults
 - Other...
5. Not including today, how many times have you visited **this** museum in the last 5 years?
6. Not including today, how many times have you visited **any** museum in the last 5 years?

Appendix B

Coding Rubric

Q1: What does the word belonging mean to you?

Code Name	Code Description	Example(s)
Safety/Comfort	Used words to describe feelings of safety and comfort	<p>“You don't feel out of place or uncomfortable. You feel safe”</p> <p>“Feeling comfortable within an environment. All the people, even though they might not look the same or act the same, we all fit together.”</p>
Community/People Connection	Used the word community and described feeling connected to people/groups	<p>“To me, belonging is a sense of feeling like you're part of some sort of community or some sort of idea or thing. it's like this feeling of being a part of some group or idea.”</p>
Being a Part of	Used common language such as “being a part of”, “part of”	<p>“Belonging? to be a part of, yeah, to be a part of something”</p> <p>“Being a part of something”</p>
Inclusivity/Acceptance	Described feeling included and accepted	<p>“To not be excluded, or otherwise meant to feel different. To be included in an experience”</p> <p>“To feel like you are accepted in the place that you are”</p>
Culture/Race	Described the importance of cultural, racial, and/or ethnic acceptance and their connection to others	<p>“So being accepted where you are, no matter your race, your culture or any type of background that you may have”</p> <p>“Inclusive with everybody around me, myself, my family, belonging to my race”</p>

Sense of Purpose/Value	Described as adding value to an environment for other guests and themselves and having a purpose	“A feeling of necessity... like those around you believe that you add value to any given environment/group. If you aren’t there, you are missed and crave to be there.” “Like a sense of purpose”
Personal Identity	Used the word identity and described a want for self expression and acceptance	“Belonging is feeling like I can be authentically myself” “seeing myself and my community in different spaces, feeling proud and not embarrassed about my identity.”

Q2: Describe a moment during your visit when you felt like you did belong

Code Name	Code Description	Example(s)
Exhibit Focused	Described non-specific exhibits and exhibit content	“Looking at the art, the self portraits” “Probably inside of the airplane. Maybe because I thought it was so cool, but I don't know, made me kind of feel belonging”
Latino Content in the Exhibit/Latino Artist, Guest Demographics, and Spanish Labels	Described specific exhibits with Latino-focused content or art created by Latino artists, described seeing guests in the same demographic, and labels in Spanish	“Finding museum labels that say an artist is from Latin America! “ “I felt like I belonged period, but I really enjoyed the displays from Mexico” “Seeing other people in my demographic” “I do like when I see, for example, that they have some explanations and signage both in English and Spanish.”

All the Time	Described feeling like they belonged for the entirety of their visit	"I never felt excluded or not supposed to be there" "The whole time I was here"
Being/Interacting with other Guests	Described interactions with other guests and people at the museum, or feelings of belonging when surrounded by others	"Seeing so many people, especially today, when I came last time, there wasn't as many people. So I did feel with there being more people, it feels like you belong there"
Connection to Nature/Being Outside	Described feelings of belonging in connection to outside and nature areas of a specific museum	"Interesting one, probably like most outside, like on the desert loop, like with like the more desert and like elements without the exhibits" "just being with nature, yeah, it was more so out in the more the wildlife walking area"
Other	Any descriptions of belonging that did not fit into the above categories	"Having text large enough to read" "None" "When I first walked into the museum"

Q3: Describe a moment during your visit when you felt like you did not belong

Code Name	Code Description	Example(s)
Exhibit Focused	Described specific exhibits and/or exhibit content	"In the contemporary area. I don't know why. I just didn't feel good there." "I guess when we were looking at snakes, I felt like I definitely didn't belong"
None/Never	Described that they had no feelings of not belonging in the museum	"None came to mind" "I never felt like I haven't belonged"

In the Cafeteria	Described specifically being in the dining area/cafeteria of the museum	<p>“No, not really. I mean, I think I didn't love the food experience in the cafeteria. Maybe that's where I felt like I didn't belong”</p> <p>“Just like in certain areas where people like to stare, like when you go into the cafeteria, there's a lot of staring happening.</p>
Other	Any descriptions of not belonging that did not fit into the above categories	<p>“Even though many signs do have the Spanish translation, there are so many other more recent signs that they don't include the translation, so that, I think is something that the museum should do better.”</p> <p>“When it was like a really intense passage that was really long and boring so I wasn't too interested, but when it was more simple, I felt like I belonged.”</p> <p>“Not having cleared walkways or maps to navigate the museum”</p> <p>“Only when we were all trying to see the same thing at the same time, we all kind of forgot spatial awareness”</p>

Q4: What community were you thinking about when you answered these questions?

Code Name	Code Description	Example(s)
Latino/Minority Community	Described community in connection to the Latino/Hispanic or minority community	<p>“My community, the Hispanic community”</p> <p>“The Latino community definitely”</p>

Geographic Location	Described community by geographic location, specific city or region	<p>“Tucson, just Tucson community”</p> <p>“I was thinking Tucson and Arizona, and it’s nearness to Mexico.”</p>
None	Described no thoughts of a specific community	“None”
Other groups	Described as all other groups such as family, friends, similar age groups, LGBTQ+, language, individual, and the museum community	<p>“I was more thinking just in general, like a Spanish speaking community”</p> <p>“just the community here in general, they were all really good and really like polite, and they actually took time to teach us some things”</p> <p>“The gay community”</p> <p>“ I don’t know, like people age like 16 to 80, so everyone, pretty much except the little kids”</p> <p>“My community”</p> <p>“My family”</p>