Docent Remix:
Profiles of Art Museum Docents in the Modern Museum

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Abstract:

Museum scholarship has focused on the critical self-evaluation museums have undergone in the last century that has lead to a transformation of the museum paradigm. By shifting focus from operating as what some might argue as myopic collecting institutions to the visitor experience of the museums content. Focusing on the visitor experience has given museums an opportunity to become better acquainted with the communities they serve through perusing innovative ways to involve and collaborate with their constituencies.

Art museums rely heavily on docents to act as interpreters of museum content shortening the distance between the institutional intent, artworks and the museum visitors. There has been a considerable amount of the research done on how art museum visitor's benefit from guided tours presented by art museum docents. Yet, there is still little research on the perceived motivations, barriers and contours of experience of docents actively participating as museum educators in art museums today. This research looked at the motivations, perceived barriers and contours of experience of art museum docents through four profiles of art museum docents serving in the modern museum. This research found that individual art museum docents cite different specific motivations for becoming art museum docents. The motivations cited by respondents of this study were; a love of art, an enjoyment of being in social environments, valuing life-long learning, and seeing themselves as people who have the skills necessary to facilitate engaging educational experiences using art objects. From this research art museum docent program administers will be better able to recruit enthusiastic and diverse individuals to serve as art museum docents to meet the educational goals in the 21st century.

Keywords: Art Education, Docents, Volunteer Motivation

….For my Parents who have endured with endless support and love throughout any endeavor I have wished to accomplish, and my very patient little dog.

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Chapter One:
Introduction

Over the last century the museum paradigm has undergone a critical self-evaluation transforming the museum and its role in society. Museums today are focusing on how they can position themselves to be relevant and provide the most good for society in a changing world. While this is not a new problem for museums, as early as 1916 educator and museum director John Cotton Dana (1999) wrote that " all public institutions, and museums are no exception should give returns for their cost and those returns should be in good degree positive, definite, visible, measurable" (p. 63) . Museums still grapple with how to best achieve these goals in a now changing and global economy through modifying their individual goals and missions. These modifications are reactions to demonstrated public needs. As museums work to anticipate and react to the needs of their communities there has been a strong shift in their institutional focus from internal operations to valuing outreach and innovative education programs.

Museums and museum scholarship have devoted considerable time and research in evaluating, qualifying and measuring the benefit they provide to the public that they serve. This has forced museums and museum scholarship to consider how the communities they serve are changing, how to best serve them and how to evaluate their individual experience. This focus on visitor experience has provided museums with an opportunity to reinvent and revitalize themselves as educational institutions.

Art institutions across America have begun to consider how they can reach a wider and more diverse audience, better represent the communities they serve and engage museum visitors with the museum content. Art museums continue to struggle to find the best educational model that is inclusive, engaging and educational while still providing a space for individuals to be inspired by the wonder and power of art. Cheryl Meszaros (2008) argues that, "the challenge for the art museum is how to make the discourses and interpretive repertoires that constitute art both visible and available to the public" (p. 157). This rediscovered challenge has altered the organizational structure of most American art museums shifting the authority of the museum from curators who have traditionally held interpretative control of museum content to a shared authority between curators and growing museum education departments. Pamela Smart (2001) argues that this shift has come due the fact that a museums access to public funding has become

closely tied to an institutions ability to prove their dedication to community building and inclusivity such that they are attracting "underrepresented" audiences. For a museum to continue to maintain public support of their operational budgets they must be able to provide measurable public good through community building and inclusivity. Museum educators have been tasked with finding new and innovative ways to qualify the public good of art museums.

The growth of museum education departments has shifted the goals of art museums to include strong public programs which encourage community involvement through educational programming that is supportive to the museum's permanent and current exhibition content. As a result of this shift many art museums have established sophisticated and rigorous educational resources for museum visitors. This has included spending considerable effort and museum resources on the implementation and administration of an excellent, vibrant and diverse docent training program. According to Robin S. Grenier and Barry Sheckley's (2008) findings in their research on experiential learning and it's implication for the preparation of docents, "museum docents strengthen a museum's role in the community, and properly trained docents use the best personal and instructional techniques not only to inform visitors, but also create a sense of involvement and excitement." (p. 79). In a time where it has become more important than ever for museums to prove their public value art museum docents have become an invaluable resource for implementing the educational goals of art museums.

Art museum docents are museum educators who are not salaried museum staff who dedicate themselves to supporting the institutions mission and values through the facilitation of public tours of the museum's collection. The mission of most art museum docent programs frame the role of art museum docents as; volunteer educators who meet the Museum's educational mission by making art accessible and enjoyable for diverse audiences. Docents sometimes called; gallery guides or interpreters depending on the institution participate in rigorous ongoing training programs instituted by the Education department of the docent's host museum. Docent training programs require a significant time and effort commitment of the host institution and the individual volunteer. These training programs prepare museum volunteers to become museum educators. The docent training program prepares volunteers to serve as hosts to museum visitors. Docents host visitors by facilitating educational experiences using a wide array of visual thinking strategies. Often the only contact a museum visitor will have with museum

personnel once they leave the front desk will be with a museum docent. Docents act as interpreters of the museum's collection. Training programs prepare docents to interpret the museum's collection through training sessions prepared by education staff in conjunction with the museum's curators. Docents are expected to independently study exhibition related materials such as exhibition catalogs and related texts. Docents also provide auxiliary security and visitor service support. Without the support of museum docents many art museums would not be able to provide guided tours to such as wide range of museum visitors.

Docents have come to play an integral role in facilitating informal education experiences for thousands of museum goers of every year which includes large numbers of school groups. Museum scholarship has focused on how docents engage and enhance the experience of the museum visitor but there has been very little research on the motivations, barriers and contours of the art museum docent experience. In order for art museums to continue to recruit and retain a diverse group of art museum docents it is important to consider what docents themselves see as; the motivation to become an art museum docent, the barriers they perceive that may keep other interested parties from becoming docents as well as the general day to day experiences they have which keep them engaged and passionate about the service they provide to art museums and museum visitors.

Currently, there is considerable research about the motivation of volunteers in America. This research can be found in the academic disciplines of sociology, psychology and the learning sciences concerning the motivations and perceived benefits of volunteers. Sociological research on volunteerism in America defines volunteering as, a "cluster of helping behaviors" which does not preclude volunteers from receiving a real or perceived benefit from their work. Sociologist John Wilson (2000) defines volunteering as a, "cluster of helping behaviors" that is given freely to benefit another person, group or organization" (p. 215). Some of the real or perceived benefits that volunteers receive from sharing their time are feelings that they are providing a "civic service," by expanding their social network to strengthen their communities.

Volunteers who feel that through their volunteer service they are providing a "civic service" is tied to believing that by participating in a volunteer opportunity they are contributing in a democratic social event by choosing to share their time to support an organization of their preference therefore strengthen the organization and building a community of individuals with

shared values. Social networking is seen as both a motivation and a perceived benefit. Sociologists have found that the more individuals are engaged in the issues that face the communities they identify with the more likely they are to engage in volunteer work. Volunteers also perceive building "human capital" and close bonds with individuals with shared interests through the social networks they create. These social networks that are established through their volunteer endeavors are considered as a benefit gained by volunteering their time.

The social benefit where individuals are able to consider themselves a part of a community where they are actively engaged provides a psychological benefit. Past research in the fields of psychology and gerontology has found that volunteerism provides a psychological benefit to adults as they reach their post- retirement years. It has been cited that volunteering "helps to improve the psychological well-being of adults in their post-retirement years by providing an activity which helps to maintain their self-esteem, general life satisfaction, access to support systems as well as the mental benefit of having a generally higher level of activity" (Willigen, 2000, p .308).

The motivations and perceived benefit as found in the research conducted by learning scientists is that volunteers participate to expand their experiences in hopes to become a part of a community of learners. They see a volunteer position as a means of gaining a life-long or an informal leaning benefit. The theoretical basis behind this idea is that those in an informal learning community pursue a range of learning outcomes that are lifelong, life-wide and life-deep. (Bell, Lewenstein, Shouse & Feder, 2008, p.28). Lifelong learning refers to the acquisition of skills that are learned because the learner was motivated by their own curiosity which they feel matches a need, task or challenge. In the case of art museum docents these individuals may be motivated by an interest in art or the museum mission but also believe that they will be able to align their own skills and interests with the challenges of the position. Life-wide learning occurs across a range of social activities. Life-wide learning is a set of experiences and skills which are gained in these specific social spheres and then applied to novel experiences in a way that helps the learner better navigate new situations. For the art museum docent they will bring their previous knowledge to the position and apply it as they see fit in their interactions with museum visitors. Life-deep learning is a set of ideologies which guide how individual learners judge themselves and others.

The field of learning science provides a way for us to better understand what motivates our participation in social, cultural and learning endeavors. This field has provided a framework for understanding the benefit that we receive from participating in these learning environments. As well as describe how we layer these experiences and apply them to new situations which shapes how we identify ourselves and others.

In the field of museum studies there has been considerable research on how art museum docents enhance the museum visitors experience but there has only been a small amount of research on the motivations, barriers and contours of experience of the art museum docent but none of the this research reflects the experience of art museum docents in the 21st century. In order to recruit and retain excellent and diverse art museum docents it is necessary to investigate the research that has already been conducted in the fields of sociology, learning sciences and museum studies. As well as look at how art museum docents perceive their own motivations, barrier and experiences.

The goal of this research is to find what currently active art museum docents perceive as the motivations, barriers and contours of experience of the 21st century art museum docent. The field of museum education will benefit from this research. The more that is known about the experiences of individual art museum docents the better able art museum education departments will be to create strategic docent recruitment and retention plans that better represent and serve art museums changing constituencies.

Chapter Two:

Review of the Literature

The field of museum studies has provided art museum professionals with a lot of research that looks at the visitor experience within the space of the art museum. While we know a lot about how to evaluate and better understand the motivations of the art museum visitor, museum scholarship has provided us with little information about the motivations, perceived barriers and contours of experience of art museum docents.

Art museum docents facilitate the visitor experience and are often the only contact that an art museum visitor will have with a representative of the institution. In a time when art museums are struggling to accommodate changing expectations and better represent the changing constituencies they serve it has become even more important than ever for art museum docents to be prepared to facilitate excellent and engaging educational experiences for a broad range of museum visitors. To recruit, train, and retain a diverse docent pool who bring with them a wide range of previous experiences that will help them to better engage a broader audience with art it is necessary to investigate the motivations, perceived barriers, and contours of experience of art museum docents in the 21st century.

Due to the limited amount of research that has been provided by museum scholarship about the motivations, perceived barriers and contours of experience of the art museum docent experience it is necessary to look at the research that has been done in other academic domains. There has been a considerable amount of research done in the disciplines of sociology, psychology and the learning sciences about the motivations and perceived benefits of volunteerism. This research can help inform museum professionals about who art museum docents are and this knowledge can be used to recruit, train, and retain a diverse art museum docent pool.

Sociological Perspective on the Motivation of Volunteers

There has been a considerable amount of research done by sociologists on the motivations and social benefits of volunteerism in America. Social scientists have become interested in studying the motivating factors of volunteers due to the serious changes that have

occurred in the socio-economic climate of the United States. The response to these changes has been with a similar national attitude to that of the "we can do it" era. This sentiment is something that government and non-profit policy makers have tried to tap into in their efforts at encouraging volunteerism. The social status conferred upon volunteers is making a gradual shift away from the something to occupy the leisure class, to an attitude of "volunteers are not asking what their country is doing for them, but asking what they can do for their country". Sociologist A. Javier Treviño (2012) wrote, "the Presidential campaign "United We Serve" marked a new era in this country, one characterized by a culture of service—involving various forms of civic engagement, community service, and volunteerism— that allows people, as citizens, to work together to ease or mitigate the predicaments and uncertainties created by poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, epidemics, calamities, and so on" (p.2). This statement also elevates individuals who participate in volunteer work as agents of social change.

The acceptance that volunteers and interns are valued elements of society and individual institutions has an element of identity creation that sociologists are interested in. As institutions of cultural memory, museums are actively reproducing societal attitudes and encouraging the transmission of culture in ways that affect the museum staff and the general public alike. Policies like the "United we Serve" campaign initiated by President Barack Obama have lifted volunteerism into the national consciousness and museum volunteers and docents are exactly the kind of people that newly inhabit the spotlight.

According to work done by sociologists Marc A Musick and John Wilson (2008) the social profile of volunteers in America is changing. They define volunteer work as a set of altruistic behaviors that benefits both the individual and the institution. Only recently has volunteer work become fully institutionalized because of the tendency of capitalist society to marginalize volunteerism as a leisure time pursuit. While volunteers may be admired for their altruism their work is devalued because it is freely given away. The work of Musick and Wilson has been substantial in describing the shifts in American consciousness which has elevated volunteerism from leisure activity to "productive" unpaid labor.

"Productive" labor is a term used in Marxist economic analysis to associate a value to work. This value has been traditionally considered only measurable in capital. The shift of the American consciousness of volunteerism from leisure activity to "productive" unpaid labor has

occurred according to Musick and Wilson as a result of the influence of feminist scholars. Musick and Wilson (2008) argue that feminist scholars have expanded the idea of what counts as "productive" labor. Stating that; "productive" labor has been broadened to include household chores, child care, and care for elderly kin, as well as informal and formal help provided to relative strangers" (p.5). This shift in American consciousness from volunteerism as unvalued leisure activity to valuable "productive" unpaid labor can be seen in the museum world as museums have begun to include volunteer hours in their income statements as earned revenue.

Sociologists have also developed functional theories of the motivations of individuals to volunteer. These functional theories account for individual motivations as well as the external influences towards volunteerism. Arguing that individuals who volunteer are not only motivated by achieving their own personal goals but that they are also seeking social approval. The work of Daniel Batson (2002) describes the motivation toward altruistic behavior such a volunteering as including social recognition, praise, avoiding guilt and shame. This work describes altruistic behavior as motivated by the values that an individual holds which in turn make them empathetic for those who they regard as less fortunate. This work also accounts for how individuals believe that they are being perceived by others. This implies that there is also some moral principle that motivates individuals to volunteer. That instead of being motivated by the feeling that they should volunteer they see volunteerism as something that they *ought* to do. The motivations of museum volunteers may have less to do with empathy but more to do with social recognition and praise. Museums have historically held a privileged role in society, the privileged nature of the space is considered by some who wish to identify with this power as transferable. In that those who are associated with the institution through philanthropy, also are regarded with a high level of prestige.

Feminist scholars have also provided a framework for considering the role that gender plays in the motivations and barriers of volunteer work for men and women. Historically, volunteer work has reproduced the dominant gender ideologies of American society. Volunteer work provided an opportunity for women to enter the public sphere without calling into question their gender role. Ann Scott (1991) argues that volunteerism for a woman is considered an "accepted extension of their defined roles as wives and mothers" (p. 24). Volunteerism provided a space where women had the ability to participate in the public sphere without stepping outside

of their traditional gender roles. This gendering of volunteerism can be supported by trends in art museum volunteers. Art museum docents have been traditionally women. This is a response to the museum sphere being a mostly male domain. Women as art museum docents have played a significant role in the facilitation of the museums mission but did not disrupt the traditional gender role of women as educators.

Linda Downs (1994) provides a historical perspective of women in the museum Downs states, "from the 1820's to the 1890's the concept of women as guardians of culture was predominant in the United States. Women were designated to contribute to the community's cultural life" (p.92). This sentiment that women were the guardians of culture kept women in supportive and mostly unpaid work in museums until the women's movement of the 1960's. Gender ideologies help to explain why volunteering fits into the social lives of men and women differently. The work of Jo Little (1997) on voluntary work and its role in the empowerment of women found that men are more likely to regard their volunteer work as complimentary to their work. While among women there is much more heterogeneity to how they relate the two spheres of their work and social time. Little sees voluntary work among women as a way for women to have a social life, seek approval of their peers, maintain existing friendships, and bond with other women. This theoretical consideration of gender ideologies and volunteer work may help explain why art museum docents have been traditionally women.

Women may feel a duty towards this type of volunteerism because it is already a safe, privileged sphere of women socializing with other women. Docent programs have historically been comprised of women. It was stated in an article profiling art museums docents, "the volunteer docent is almost always a female, and characteristically from the white, upper middle class segment of the community" (Bleick, 1980 p.19). In the modern museum this trend had begun to change and there are more men serving as art museum docents than ever before. Change in the gender demographics of art museum docents has been gradual. American art museum docent programs are still primarily comprised of female volunteers with very few men.

The historical context provided by feminist scholarship on the gendered ideologies of volunteerism is useful in explaining why we see such a high rate of women as art museum docents. The work by Anne Brigitta Yeung (2004) suggests another trend in the motivations of volunteerism as being about making an individual value choice in a postmodern world where

individual life-centered motivations are underscored. Yeung states, volunteerism is by nature a phenomenon that may well incorporate both traditional and modern, and collective and individualistic elements" (p. 22). The motivations of individuals towards volunteering have several motivating social factors which are both initiated by individual values and social expectations. Museum volunteers have mimicked the societal views of volunteerism. The volunteer work done in the museum sphere has undergone a significant change while still representing some of the historically traditional gendered roles of volunteerism. Women since the 1960's have assumed leadership roles in the museum field which has changed the dynamic of museum volunteers. Volunteer positions in museums especially positions where the primary duty of the volunteer is to facilitate educational experiences such as art museum docents have begun to draw in more male participants.

Psychological Perspectives on the Motivations and Benefits of Volunteerism

Volunteerism in America is motivated by many sociological factors which are both motivated by individual values as well as a societal need. All motivations towards volunteerism in America have some perceived benefit. In the sociological research it has been found that the motivation for individuals to volunteer is related to the individuals' social status, level of community involvement or the perceived social benefit that they believe the behavior will provide. Whereas the psychological perspectives on what motivates individuals to become volunteers are more focused on the sense of well-being that volunteers receive from their service. This has been of particular interest of those doing research on retirees and their sense of well-being after retirement. Some of the psychological benefits that have been researched are; enhanced cognitive abilities, reduced feelings of alienation and isolation especially later in adult life, increased sense of purpose and leadership status in society, and the addition of an established structure to daily life.

Psychologists E. Gil Clary and Mark Snyder (1999) provided a functional framework to describe the motivations for individuals to volunteer. Clary and Snyder find, "people can and do perform the same actions in the service of different psychological functions (e.g people engage in the same volunteer activity but do so to fulfill different motives)" (p. 156). In their work a functional approach was taken to investigate the motivations of individuals to become

volunteers. They identified six function motivations; values, understanding, enhancement, career, social and protective. Each of these functional motivations focuses on a personal goal that is the function of motivation. The conceptual considerations for these functions are that individuals who are motivated to volunteer need to do one of the following; express a personally held value, better understand the world or their own skills, grow and enhance their psychological well-being, gain an experience that will benefit another part of their life, gain a social network or reduce negative feelings such as guilt.

For Clary and Snyder a fulfilled volunteer is motivated by one or more of these functions. These functional motivations were similar to the motivations that were found in the sociological research but focused less on the social context that volunteering provides. Instead the focus was shifted to the personal goal fulfillment of the individual. This work provides a context for psychological inquiry on volunteerism in that it makes an important distinction that individuals can engage in the same activity while being motivated by different factors. This is important in the consideration of art museum docents because each individual begins their docent experience with a different personal goal or benefit that they deem valuable.

In a study conducted by Marieke Van Willigan (2000) on the differential psychological benefits of volunteering across life courses, Willigan found that older volunteers received greater psychological benefit from their volunteer service than younger volunteers. The reason cited for this conclusion was that older volunteers tend to have a greater satisfaction in the volunteer work that they participate in and commit more time to their service. This could help explain why art museum docents are primarily older and are willing to make such large time commitments to docent programs.

The theory that older volunteers receive a greater psychological benefit from volunteering also played a crucial role in Yunqing Li and Kenneth E Ferraro's (2005) work on the correlation between lower rates of depression amongst volunteers in later life. Their work researched the correlation between volunteering later in life and reduced rates of depression through a longitudinal study of volunteering adults. Their study found that there was a reduced rate of diagnosed cases of depression amongst adults who volunteered compared to those who did not volunteer. They concluded that this may be because individuals who volunteer have a higher sense of well-being because they have a stronger sense of social involvement,

participation and are generally more self fulfilled. Those who volunteer are less likely to be depressed because volunteering provides support in some of the common areas that lead to depression in older adults such as feelings of alienation, isolation and loss of social status. It may also be that those individuals who do not have depression are more likely to engage in social events.

Most of the research on the psychological benefit of volunteering focuses on the benefit that is received from volunteering as the motivation; other research has concluded that individuals who are motivated to volunteer generally are better equipped to act on their behalf to seek out activities that will promote their well-being. Peggy Thoits and Lindi Hewett (2001) found, "people who have greater personality resources and better physical and mental health should be more likely to seek (or be sought out for) community service" (p. 115). This may be why there is such a high rate of reported satisfaction described in these studies which is considered as resulting from the psychological benefit of volunteering. Individuals are satisfied by their volunteer work because they have become agents in their own pursuit of well-being. If it is assumed that individuals who volunteer are already aware of their own personal need and goals which has motivated their volunteerism there is an excellent chance that they have found a volunteer position that is best suited to fulfill these goals.

The work of psychologists has provided a perspective where individuals are agents of their own personal happiness or fulfillment. This work accounts for the fact that each individual will have a unique reason to volunteer. The choice to participate in volunteer opportunity is motivated by resources and skills that an individual already possesses to fulfill a functional need. While considerable work has been done describing the psychological motivations and benefits there is very little work done on the perceived barriers that keep people from volunteering. It could be assumed from what has been said in the work presented that individual who are not equipped physically, mentally or socially to function in society will not be prone to volunteer. There is a body of work that suggests that because of the psychological benefits of volunteer work it should be mandatory in certain stages of life. However, this mandatory volunteerism ignores the importance of individual agency which is tied to well-being. Individuals need the opportunity to seek out what fulfils a functional need for their feelings of personal well-being to be maintained or perhaps elevated by the work. Agency is the factor in individual motivation to

volunteer which results in greater physical, mental and social sense of well-being that benefits both the individual and society at large.

Learning Theory and the Motivations and Benefits of Volunteerism

Learning science as a discipline has taken a multidisciplinary approach to its research. The learning sciences use learning theory concepts from other disciplines to inform the study of motivations, benefits, and the process of learning. To become an art museum docent or a volunteer it is necessary to learn new skills and adapt previously held skill sets to perform the volunteer position. Art museum docents are required to learn a considerable amount of new information to fulfill the volunteer position. The need for an individual to commit to learning a large amount of new information and continue to adapt to the changing needs of the museum visitors requires a motivation to learn new skill, the ability to adapt previous skills and a need to transmit new knowledge to others. The learning sciences have provided a framework for understanding the motivations, benefits and the process of acquiring new knowledge.

John Dewey (1938) understands the process of education to be shaped by an individual's experience shaping what they will learn and what impulses to learn they will have over the course of their life. He states, "every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (p. 38). Dewey distinguishes between experiences that are educational in saying that educational experiences move individuals towards new desires and purposes, and experiences that are mis-educative are experiences that are not a moving force in an individual's life. This work situates learning as a series of social experiences that motivates individuals to pursue new experiences. This is useful in the consideration of the motivation of volunteers. The motivation to volunteer could be sparked by previous experiences that provided them with a purpose to pursue a new experience.

Dewey's approach to the motivation and process of learning is often described as "constructivist" in that individuals are motivated to learn new things based on previous experience. They continue to build upon these experiences over the course of their lifetime. Constructivist theory is dominant in the domain of informal learning because this theory specifically accounts for the previous experiences and knowledge that individuals bring to every learning situation as well as the potential for learning outside of formal educational

environments. Constructivist theory is also found in the work of Lev Vygotsky who pioneered the idea of scaffolding through his model of the zone of proximal development. This theory emerged from Vygotsky's work that was socio-psychological, and assumed that all learning was a process that was facilitated by a social interaction that builds on previous knowledge over the life course of the individual. This notion of scaffolding is more recently seen in the work of Kevin Crowley and Melanie Jacobs where a theory of building islands of expertise emerged.

According to Crowley and Jacobs (2010) islands of expertise in children are, "topics in which children happen to become interested in which they develop relatively deep and rich knowledge" (p. 333). This notion describes the phenomenon where a child becomes interested in a topic and becomes an expert through co-constructed knowledge between themselves, their caregivers and activities. This assumes that learning is both social and motivated by individual interest. This is important to consider when describing the motivations of individuals to become art museum docents because it assumes that these individuals had previous experience with art or art museums or have had a series of experiences over the course of their lives. These experiences have lead them to believe that they have expertise in this area and can inhabit a role where they facilitate education experiences for museum visitors.

Abigail Housen (1980) has looked at the development of expertise specifically in art museums based on what she refers to as stages of aesthetic development. The stages of aesthetic development categorize visitors by their ability to make aesthetic judgments about art. There are five stages outlined by Housen and each describes a varying level of judgment which progress from analytic to post-analytic. Housen argues that the highest level of aesthetic development is when an individual "views the art object as significant in its own right, as consisting of an internal logic to which the viewer must bring diverse perspectives, feelings and insights" (p. 17). The development of aesthetic judgment is useful in the examination of the experience of art museum docents because art museum docents in the course of their docent training come to see art as significant in its own right and are then able to transmit this knowledge to visitors by asking them to view the objects and make their own judgments about the work.

The way that art museum docents enhance their expertise in facilitating engaging experiences could be considered situated learning. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) wrote a body of work that defines the process of learning as legitimate peripheral participation.

According to Lave and Wenger peripheral participation is a way of conceptualizing the relationship between novices and experts. They argue that peripheral participation, "concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice" (p. 29). This process assumes that individuals come to a new domain of learning as a novice and by engaging with a community of learners who have already gained some expertise become a full participant in a domain becoming a central participant.

In research conducted by Mary Abu-Shumays and Gaea Leinhardt (2002) the concept of peripheral participation is used to explain how art museum docent transform their status from museum visitor to art museum docent . They suggest that art museum docents are a community of highly skilled individuals who are motivated lifelong learners who begin as peripheral participants in the museum and after receiving formal training occupy a central position in the daily activity of the museum. Shumays and Lienhardt see the rigorous formal training program as the transformative space where individuals move from museum visitor to art museum docent. In the formal training program art museum docents are given access to different communities of expertise such as curators, exhibit designers and educators until they are able to identify themselves as central participants.

Shumays and Leinhardt cite that docents are a community of highly skilled individuals who are motivated lifelong learners. The concept of lifelong learning has been described by the committee on learning science in informal environments as, "the acquisition of competencies, skills and attitudes using information over the life course, recognizing that developmental needs and interests vary at different life stages. Generally, learners prefer to do things because they are motivated to do so by their interests, need, curiosity, pleasure and sense that they have talents that align with certain kinds of tasks and challenges" (Bell, Et al., 2008, p. 28). This statement closely aligns with the theories of peripheral participation and stages of aesthetic development. Individuals who are highly motivated by interest in a topic are likely to gain more knowledge about the topic. In some instances they will go on to join a community of learners and become a central participant. Art museum docents are excellent examples of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

The disciplines of sociology, psychology and learning sciences have provided an excellent theoretical framework to consider the motivations, benefits and perceived barriers for individuals to become art museum docents. While each of these disciplines considers the motivation, benefits and barriers from different perspectives the same underlying themes emerge. Individuals are motivated externally and internally through social and situational experiences. These experiences shape how individuals will react and pursue different interests over the course of their lives. The more that is known about the motivations of people to broaden their experiences over their life course the better able institutions will be able to respond to these individuals and engage those who are in most need of moving from a peripheral participant to becoming a central participant to receive the benefit of strengthening their social ties and emotional well-being.

Chapter Three:

Methods

Art museums rely heavily on docents who facilitate educational experiences though public tours for thousands of museum visitors every year. While museums have been grappling with how to better engage broader audiences with art museum content docents have played an important role in shortening the distance between the institution and the museum visitor. To better understand the role that art museum docents play in the modern museum it is necessary to investigate what art museum docents recognize as the motivation, barriers and contours of their experience as art museum docents. The goal of this research is to investigate the motivations, perceived barriers and contours of experience of art museum docents in the modern art museum from the perspective of active docents.

Research data was gathered through semi-structured informal interviews with active art museum docents. Candidate pools were collected from two Northwest Coast art institutions of similar size, collection focus and annual visitor-ship. Individual candidates were selected by Docent Coordinators; those candidates selected were then asked to voluntarily commit their time to participate in a single informal interview to discuss their individual experience. This data has been qualified by coding docent responses to questions concerning their motivation to become an art museum docent, the barriers that they encountered in the process as well as the barriers that they perceive keep other individuals from becoming art museum docents, and the contours of their present experience.

Short informational meetings were set up with docent program coordinators. These meetings were structured to gain an understanding of the institutional mission and goals, the training program, and social events and obligations of the docent program. Docent program coordinators were asked to provide a candidate pool of docents who they felt best represented the group as a whole. These docents were then contacted and asked if they would be interested in participating in a brief interview about the motivations, perceived barriers and contours of their experience as an art museum docent. Fifteen docents were contacted at the two different institutions. Four out of the fifteen docents that were initially contacted responded. These four

docents participated in a brief semi-structured interview conducted at the institution where they are docents.

Methodology Rationale

The four docents that responded to the initial request were representative of the candidate of the candidate pool that had been provided by the docent coordinators from the institutions. Each docent coordinator had been asked to identify five individuals that they felt best represented the docent group as a whole. Each institution provided a similar list of candidates which were comprised of individuals ranging in age from 30-74 and more than half female. The median age of the candidate pools provided by the docent coordinators was 68, those who were interviewed fell in the range of 65-70 with one outlier who was 47. It was valuable for this research to have contact with an individual who was much younger than the median age then one who was much older because many of the docents who were above the median age of 68 had a lower level of participation in the program. This lowered level of participation in the program was not by individual choice but initiated by the institution. Most docent programs reward their longest serving docents by minimizing the amount of tours that they are required to give. Of the three institutions chosen for this research the minimum required years of service before a reduction in the docent's tour schedule commitment was 8 years. Most of the docents who were older than the median age of 68 had fulfilled the minimum requirement for reduced duty.

In the institutions that were contacted for this research project less than one-third of the docents were men. Since such a small number of men were represented in the institutions that were contacted for this research, it was not possible to find a reasonable median age. One male interviewed was chosen from the institution that had the highest number of males serving as art museum docents. During his interview he was asked to describe if he felt his experience was similar or dissimilar to other male docents at his institution. This was done to provide a context for his experience that accounted for the fact that he was amongst the minority of the art museum docent population.

This research was qualitative, and the way that data was collected was based on a constructivist assumption that meaning is constructed by how individuals engage with the world. From this basic consideration data was collected with the assumption that each individual

understood and interpreted their engagement with being an art museum differently while still situated in a historical and social context. John Creswell (2009) states, a qualitative approach to constructivism is "establishing the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants" (p. 16). This research sought to identify the key motivations, barriers and contours of experience of an art museum docent in the modern art museum as explained by active art museum docents. In order to obtain personal reflections and narratives from individuals a semi-structured interview protocol was created.

Semi- structured interviews were conducted to collect narratives from individual docents to create an enhanced picture of their experience. In preparation for the interviews a checklist was created of the key areas to be clarified by the interview. This checklist included that they speak on the five key areas of this research, these key areas were; motivation to become an art museum docent, barriers they encountered in the process of becoming an art museum docent, the perceived benefit of becoming an art museum docent, their level of fulfillment or satisfaction, and what keeps them engaged and willing to continue to participate in the program.

Each interviewee was also asked to introduce themselves providing any information about themselves that they felt was important. All of the introductions included their level of education, previous or current occupation and length of time that they have been an art museum docent without any prompting. All other areas were prompted by an open ended question about a key research area. If the interviewee presented a response where a clear pattern or key term was used they were asked to expand on the themes that were coming out in their individual response. If not, they were asked another open ended question narrowed the focus to one of the key research areas.

These interviews were conversational and the docents were encouraged to expand on each of the key areas, focusing on what they found to be the most important aspects of the experience. They were also asked if they felt their experiences were similar or dissimilar to their colleagues. This provided a context for the responses they presented as the docents themselves imagined their experiences in relation to their colleagues. The conversational tone of the semi-structured interview provided an opportunity to follow up on reoccurring words, concepts and themes that the interviewee used in response to the open-ended questions about a given key area of research interest. A structured interview would not have provided an opportunity for the

interviewee to recollect on their experiences in the same way. Each interviewee had specific terms and concepts that they would choose to emphasize throughout the interview process. The patterns of emphasis would not have been as clear if the participants had been asked the same set of questions.

Once the interviews were conducted the responses were transcribed and coded. Interviews were coded based on the key research areas. All responses, terms and concepts that responded directly to any of the key research areas were coded under; motivations, barriers and contours of experience. These coded responses were then considered as narrative research and were analyzed by using key concepts in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, learning sciences and museum studies. These works were chosen because these disciplines have already researched the motivations and barriers as perceived by individuals who volunteer and as experienced as an unconscious subtext to the situations. Specifically the qualitative language of these disciplines helps us address the incidental consequences of the actions of individuals who volunteer. The responses were also considered in context by what was known of each of the institutional goals and expectations of the institution of the participating art museum docent.

Chapter Four:

Results

Introduction to the Respondents

Respondent A is a 68 year old retired female. She has been a docent for eight years. Her highest level of education is a Master's of Arts degree in Speech Pathology. She was formally employed as Speech Pathologist. Throughout her professional career she worked with teenagers suffering from speech impediments and adults suffering from aphasia. Her husband's job required that they move to Europe for some years and once they were both of retirement age they decided to return to the United States. Upon her return to the U.S she became interested in becoming an art museum docent.

She was motivated by an interest in forming a new social network. She found it difficult to make new friends at her stage of life she stated, "I didn't know anybody, we didn't have a dog, and we didn't have a baby, so it was really hard." Motivated by a need to make friends and felt that the best way to accomplish that goal was to become more involved in the community. Looking to volunteer work to build her social network was not new to her. She had a long history of volunteer work and community involvement. While living abroad she had spent a lot of time visiting museums. She stated, "I had a lot of experience in all kinds of museums not as a docent but just as a visitor, so I thought I maybe had a sort of start on that, I knew the atmosphere and I enjoy art." Since she felt very comfortable with the museum space and had built a strong appreciation for art in her years abroad and felt that her skill set and interest met the requirements of the art museum docent.

Respondent B is a 68 year old retired male. He has been a docent for three years. His highest level of education is a Master's of Arts degree and he also holds a law degree. He was formally employed as an attorney for 30 years. In his retirement years he has looked to pursue many new skills and interests that he was unable to explore because of the large amount of time that he had to commit to his job. He was motivated by a specific interest in Native American culture. This interest led him to become a gallery guide at a small museum that focused on Native American culture. After retiring he and his wife moved to a new state and there were no

ethnographic museums with the same focus. He felt that an art museum would provide a broader focus where he could constantly learn about new concepts. He felt that his previous education and experience would help him become an excellent docent. He wanted to volunteer where he could learn new things but also use the skills he learned from being an attorney for 30 years such as, speaking in front of large groups and the ability to synthesize large amounts of information into something short and interesting.

Respondent C is a 67 year old retired University Dean. She is in her second year of docent training. During her professional career she had also been; a public school teacher, a school administrator, and a professor of Literacy in her working career. In her career in academia she found it important to connect art with literacy. When she decided to become an art museum docent she was interested in finding a good training program that would teach her how to work with adults and children using art. She felt that a good training program was important because for her this was a new teaching context. Throughout her career she always did community work and saw volunteering as an expansion of her professional role. She was motivated to become an art museum docent because she had a love and interest in art history and the new questions that were being raised in the field. She was also motivated by a love of teaching people, the high level of satisfaction that comes from being a part of institutional work, and her commitment to life-long learning.

Respondent D is 42 year old stay at home mother. She has been a docent for five years. Her highest level of education is a Master's of Art degree in Business. She is unemployed by choice. Her children are school aged which leaves her daytime free and she uses this time to volunteer in many different capacities which includes a city parks and recreational board. What motivated her to become an art museum docent was a need to do something that was a part of the broader community. Most of the volunteer work that she had previously done was in her immediate community. She was also interested in doing volunteer work that was a complete change of pace from her everyday life she felt that because she had very little previous experience in the art and art history field. She felt that becoming an art museum docent would provide her with different cultural perspectives and new experiences that she would not have the opportunity to experience otherwise.

Analysis

While each individual docent came to their respective docent training programs with different experiences and reasons for becoming an art museum docent they all were motivated by some of the same factors. The motivations cited by each of the respondents was; a deep love or interest in art, a desire to be around people with similar interests, an aspiration to be a life- long learner, and identify themselves as a person who is capable of facilitating an educational experience through the power of art.

The work that has previously been done on the motivation of individuals to serve as volunteers has found that individuals must feel that they are gaining a perceived benefit from their volunteer work before they will be willing to commit large amounts of their time to unpaid work. One respondent stated, "I think it is a lot of fun. Why else would I be here? You have to give a lot of time and you have to ask yourself what would I rather be doing? If you would rather be at home watching T.V, and if no, then you have to find something else to do with your time." From this statement it can be understood that individuals who volunteer see their volunteer work as an extension of their lives. They feel that their volunteer work aligns best with how they prefer to spend their leisure time. How individuals spend their leisure time is a good indicator of what they value. In that they are likely to spend their time associated with a community that they identify with or desire to be identified with by others.

Art museums docents inhabit an interesting space in the domain of volunteer work because aside from the life-long learning, social, psychological benefits of volunteer work there is also a level of pride that art museum docents feel. These feelings of pride stem from a perceived prestige that museums have and the docents want to be able to identify with this prestige. This notion of prestige has been socially constructed from a long history of art museums being considered as exclusive spaces. The discourse of art museums as exclusive spaces also holds true the assumption that this exclusivity is transferable to those associated with the space. This does not preclude that art museum docents are not also motivated by feelings of altruism. These individuals see themselves as people who have an interest in art and they have joined the docent training program with the goal of becoming experts in facilitating educational experiences for other visitors.

In some ways art museum docents can be considered expert museum visitors. They consider themselves as expert visitors in the sense that they feel that they have received the highest level of learning benefit that they can receive from viewing art as visitor. Due to the feeling that they have reached their goals as a visitor they then feel that they need to change their relationship with the institution to better fit their learning goals in the domain of art or art history.

Art museum docents act primarily as interpreters of the museum content shortening the distance between the visitor and the institutions educational goals. Since the duty of the art museum docent is primarily in the engagement of diverse audiences which come to share in the museum experience with varying levels of expertise and interest it is important for art museum docents to appreciate and be interested in working with the public. All of respondents cited in their interviews both an interest in building a social network with their peers who have a similar interest in art but also an interest in working with the general public.

For three of the respondents they had entered into their retirement years and found that they were able to meet new friends as an art museum docent. These friendships were built on a mutual interest in art and art history. Since they felt that they were amongst their peers all of the respondents stated that they appreciated and respected the peer review process that was established by the institution to evaluate their individual performance. The peer review process in docent training programs is a way for art museum docents to be encouraged, coached, and critiqued by their peers. This process was very well received by all of the respondents and was cited by each as not only a way to improve their performance but also to build comradely among the docents. They felt that the peer review process was a great way to receive helpful feedback about their tours from other individuals who may have overcome similar difficulties or issues in their own tours and could provide critiques and tools to use in their tours in a mutually respectful way.

Beyond the friendships that are gained through being a part of a community of art museum docents all of the respondents stated that they enjoyed working with the public. All of the respondents had some previous history of professional or volunteer work where they worked with some subset of the public. Their previous experience working with the public shaped what types of public they most enjoyed working with in the museum. For some they were motivated by the love of working with children. From the responses a correlation emerged between their

previous experience and what type of visitor they felt that they connected with the most. For those respondents who had experience working with children they cited that they most enjoyed working with children, whereas the respondent that had no experience working with children cited that he enjoyed working with adults. On respondent who had a significant previous experience working with children stated that, " In the mornings there are three hundred kids and they are all excited because they are on a fieldtrip and getting to interact with them is fun and exciting. But the real benefit to me is that you really get the hope of the future. Once you get upstairs you just say, "wow" like they are so insightful, or they are so worried or thoughtful or caring. I see the message of the children when they are free to talk about art." All of the respondents shared a similar sentiment in that they felt encouraged from working with the public and that if they did not receive positive feedback from their tours they felt that they had the let the visitors down. The positive feedback from the public was a reason for continued engagement in the program for all of the respondents.

All of the respondents considered themselves life-long learners. They all had received graduate level degrees in different fields and were dedicated to continuing education. The three respondents in retirement cited that they were always interested in learning new concepts and skills but were limited in pursuing these goals while still working and building their professional lives. Once they were retired they felt that they had the time to pursue some of their own educational goals. Respondent C worked in academia throughout her professional career and felt that community involvement and education had always been a part of her life so continuing to pursue that passion in a new context was particularly appealing in her retirement years. Respondent D who had not yet reached retirement is unemployed by choice and has time to commit to pursue her own educational goals, she cited that she wanted to get involved in something that was more "culturally expansive" then she was receiving in her everyday life. All of the respondents were highly motivated learners and felt that being an art museum docent fulfilled and educational goal for them. All of the respondents also shared that they felt that this was true of their colleagues. Respondent D stated, "I think that everybody comes from different walks of life, I mean every profession is represented down that hall, but I think that we come together in that we all think that it is kind of neat to her people talk about art." While they all may come to the program with different experiences they are all able to grow together as learners. They become a community of learners through talking about art and strengthening that

skill. If they were not experts in art or art history before beginning the program they all share a passion and a goal of becoming better facilitators of educational experiences through the use of art objects.

While all of the respondents were interested in becoming art museum docents so that they could enhance their expertise in art and art history they felt that they already had skill sets that would be useful in facilitating engaging experiences with art. Each of the respondents stated that they were confident that they had the ability to become an art museum docent. While they felt that they had the necessary skills to become excellent docents they also felt challenged by their training programs. These frustrations were not limitations to their experience in becoming docents but instead made them feel that they had grown as learners.

Since the respondents were highly educated in other domains they were able to reflect on their own skills and what experiences they could bring to the docent program. All of the respondents also stated that they felt that they were able to learn new material. If they struggled with any of the training process they all felt confident that they would be able to ask the appropriate questions and find the right resources so that they would be able to overcome the challenge. One respondent stated, "I have always been a person who asked a lot of questions in my personal life so that is what made being a docent easy for me. I think I have worked harder studying. I have done more studying, than I had before. It helps me when I visit other museums, I love going to other museums and seeing an artist that I have studied before." The docents that were interviewed all felt that they were confident that they could overcome the challenges of learning new material because they have experienced the process of learning before. They felt from their previous experiences in formal education that they knew how to best cope with the acquisition of knowledge and skills in new subjects.

Some of the barriers that these docents perceived were reasons why some individuals may not be able to become art museum docents were the time commitment, the interest in art and not feeling comfortable in an art museum. All of the respondents agreed that the major barrier keeping interested individuals from becoming art museum docents is the large time commitment. This commitment they felt would be difficult to accommodate unless you were retired, unemployed or had flexible employment. The required time commitment is a serious limiting factor which may keep people who are interested in becoming docents from being able to

participate in the program. Due to this large time commitment it is also difficult to draw individuals who are not highly interested in learning about art. The training program is extensive and requires both working as a group to learn new material as well self guided work which the individual would have to be engaged in to continue to participate in the program. This requires new docents to be skilled learners. Another barrier is that to become an art museum docent an individual must be able to see themselves as a person who is an expert about art or art history and wants to share that expertise. Furthermore, art museums have built a reputation of prestige that has excluded some individuals from feeling comfortable in the space. If an individual does not feel like they are able to inhabit the space they are very unlikely to be motivated to attempt to become a part of that community. This may be why art museum docents tend to be very homogenous in race, class and status.

Implications

From these findings a better picture of art museum docents in the modern museum has emerged. The current docent is motivated by an interest in art, life-long learning and feeling like they have the skills necessary to be excellent docents. The barriers they perceive are the large time commitment, ability to learn new material, and feelings of exclusion from the museum space. Ultimately, art museum docents want to become a part of a community of experts in the field of art or art history. By facilitating educational experiences for museum visitors using art objects they feel that they can identify themselves as experts as well as be identified by others as experts. This fulfils a goal social, psychological, educational or otherwise which they deeply value.

Limitations

One limiting factor of this research was the small sample sizes of the candidate pools. Docent coordinators were asked to provide five contacts which they felt best represented their docent program as a whole. Each candidate pool was to provide a snapshot of the institutions program. However, only a small number of each institutions candidate pool was willing to participate in this research project. Due to this it was necessary to piece together a representative group of informants from two institutions. Overall, the four candidates given the very small

sample size were generally representative of art museum docents from what was known of these two institutions.

Another limiting factor of this research was that all of the individuals that were interviewed were of the same socio-economic class, had received similar education and were of similar cultural extraction. While this limitation is a result of the actual demographics of art museum docents in the modern museum there are individuals who are art museum docents who come from various ethnic backgrounds and have received different levels of education. Interviews with these individuals could have provided a context for the perceived barriers that keep individuals who fall outside of the majority demographic of art museum docents from becoming art museum docents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research is a part of only a small body of work that is currently being done on art museum docents. As museums are grappling with how they can best stay relevant in a changing world and continue to better serve their constituencies it is necessary to research and collect more data about art museum docents. Volunteers are a way for the community to become involved in the museum space and this type of community collaboration is essential to the success of museums as we go forward. Volunteers should represent a snapshot of the community that the museum serves. From this research it was found that the art museum docents are a relatively homogenous group and there are opportunities for museums to focus on having their education programs reflect the diverse communities they serve. To work toward more diverse art museum docent participants more research will need to be conducted.

All of the art museum docents that were interviewed cited that they felt like they had skills that closely matched what they perceived were the necessary skills to be an excellent art museum docent. They also felt like they indentified with the museums mission and felt comfortable in the museum. Art museums will need to continue to work to be inclusive of all audiences. The more inclusive the museum space is the more individuals from previously under-represented audiences will be motivated to participate in programs of this type. No person should feel that they are unwelcome in a public art museum.

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