

Come Here Often? Nonfrequent Visitor Perceptions of Art Museums

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Abstract

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Contemporary art museum audiences are faced with limited time devoted to leisure activities and more options to satisfy needs for socialization, learning, and revitalization. Findings from audience research demonstrate that frequent visitors perceive museums as capable of satisfying leisure time needs, however, current literature underrepresents nonfrequent visitor perceptions of art museums. This study explores what perceptions, if any, nonfrequent visitors associate with visiting art museums. Nonfrequent visitors, as defined by this study, have not visited art museums more than once a year within the last two years. The researcher interviewed 80 adult nonfrequent visitors in non-art museum settings in the greater Seattle region. Results showed that nonfrequent visitors are motivated to spend leisure time on activities perceived as bolstering a sense of wellness such as stress-relieving exercise or entertainment. Nonfrequent visitors generally associate art museums with positive perceptions as places beneficial for socializing, learning, and revitalization and they attribute these perceptions to the act of looking at art in art museums. These findings may be useful to museum professionals as museums broaden their audience demographic and market themselves as suitable for meeting leisure time needs, as well as researchers interested in public perceptions of museums.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Museum work that prioritizes visitors should extend beyond standard practices of acknowledging and considering the importance of visitor needs. Instead, museums must be held accountable to the broader public by leading institutional decision-making with conclusions driven by their input and perceptions (AAM, 2010). Despite prevailing support from the public as important cultural institutions, museum visitation is declining – especially to art museums (BritainThinks, 2013; LaPlace Cohen, 2017; National Endowment for the Arts, 2013; 2015). While research demonstrates that museum visitors perceive and use museums according to unique sets of self-related needs such as socialization, informal learning, and revitalization, contemporary museum audiences have less time devoted to leisure activities such as visiting museums and more options that fulfil the same needs as provided by museums (Black, 2011; Falk, 2016; Kelly, 2007; Rand, 1996). Reliant on public relevancy, museums must act as flexible, responsive spaces that adjust and accommodate the changing circumstances and perspectives of their visitors (Macleod, 2005).

Faced with increasing work-life demands and competing leisure time options, contemporary museum audiences have become more discerning in how they spend their time (Kelly, 2007; Black, 2011). If museums plan to cultivate new audiences or even just maintain current visitor demographics, it is critical that they understand the public's needs and perceptions (Miller, 2011; Falk 2016). Unfortunately, the ineffective marketing of museum purpose and opportunities for collaborative engagement fails to attract younger and culturally diverse populations (Black, 2011). While studies have found that visitors perceive museums as places capable of satisfying leisure time needs, research predominantly represents the perceptions and

experiences of frequent visitors despite the proliferation of nonfrequent and non-visitors (Miller, 2011; Falk, 2016, Mercier, 2017; Rand, 1996). This study defines nonfrequent visitors as those who have not visited any art museums more than once a year within the last two years and non-visitors as people who rarely visit museums, if ever.

Museum visitors experience the designed spaces of exhibitions in highly individualized and intrinsically motivated ways, making meaning in relation to their personal identities (Falk, 2001, 2006; Samis & Michaelson, 2017). For example, while an exhibition space might inspire solitary reflection in one visitor, the same exhibition might serve as a social experience for another (Falk, 2001; 2006). Therefore, contemporary and visitor-centric museums must scaffold a spectrum of opportunities for varied engagement and ensure relevance for all (Samis & Michaelson, 2017). Additionally, a museum must present a unified personality to visitors and set consistent behavioral expectations or risk creating confusion and disrupting feelings of comfort and ease (Walhimer, 2015). For example, a museum which presents a unified museum personality is like “a really good friend you have known for years” and is a place where you know exactly what to expect and feel relaxed in because there is trust and a base knowledge that informs expectations (Walhimer, 2015). Therefore, a complete welcome into museums requires holistic efforts that recognize visitors’ physical, social, and personal development needs (Rand, 1996).

Beyond a visitor’s perception of a singular experience, the manner of presentation and interpretation of museum content and spaces cumulatively contributes to the public’s shared understanding of museums (Bedigan, 2016; Falk, 2016). Involving both physical senses and cognitive processes, perception is shaped uniquely by background knowledge, preferences, and identities (Leschenko, 2016). Moreover, the public’s socio-culturally defined understanding in

combination with individual, direct experience of museum spaces affects public expectations of museum exhibitions (Falk, 2016). Desiring strong connections between themselves and their immediate environment, visitors' entry motivations directly guide the criteria used to evaluate the museum's success in meeting their leisure time needs (Bedigan, 2016; Falk, 2016).

Moreover, perceived misalignment between individual leisure needs and confidence in museums to meet them discourages first-time and repeat visitation (Falk, 2016).

Contemporary museums and their public are simultaneously experiencing an exploration of the purpose of museums (Black, 2011). With annual attendance to art museums dropping, especially with age demographics under the age of 35, art museums must find new ways to frame and communicate their services as public benefits (Black, 2011; National Endowment for the Arts, 2013; 2015). Working to fulfill the personal development and environmental needs of visitors, the future of museums depends on sustained and collaborative engagement with the public to inform museum literacy practices (Black, 2011). A philosophy of accessibility, museum literacy empowers visitor familiarity and mastery over museum holdings and services (Stapp, 1984). By seeking public input and evaluating contemporary perceptions of services, museums and their visitors can begin collaborating on a shared understanding of museums that is more intuitive and visitor-accessible.

Research Purpose

This study is designed to capture information about contemporary opinions of nonfrequent visitors related to art museums and contribute to the field's broader understanding of the public. The purpose of this study is to explore what perceptions, if any, nonfrequent visitors associate with visiting art museums and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums?
2. To what characteristics of art museums do nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions?

Significance

While research emphasizes visitor-centric accommodations and recommends exploring non-frequent visitor leisure time needs, there is an absence of input evaluating this audience's current leisure time needs and perceptions of art museum experiences. As art exhibitions introduce and normalize different modalities of encountering museum content, understanding public perceptions of leisure activities related to art exhibitions is needed to understand audience expectations and inform future planning of visitor-centric museum experiences (Leahy, 2012). Moreover, asking the same visitors the same questions about their perceived visit experiences – namely frequent visitors – neglects the needs and assumptions of the wider museum audience (Miller, 2011). This study specifically focuses on nonfrequent visitor perceptions outside of museum settings and analyzes participant responses related to public leisure time needs of “socialization, learning, and revitalization (Rand, 2001; Falk, 2016).”

The results from this study are expected to contribute insightful information on the public's relationships with art museums. Understanding contemporary perceptions of institutional inclusivity, purpose, and relevance is crucial for all museum workers, but especially communications and visitor service representatives. The study's findings will also strengthen the field's understanding of the public's leisure time needs and visitors' identity-related motivations. As more options for leisure time activities inundate people's daily lives, understanding what options people spend time with and why can help museums adapt and market themselves as

suitable for meeting specific public leisure needs. Furthermore, awareness of visitor perceptions maximizes the design and learning efforts of museum exhibition designers and educators (Leschenko, 2016). As an example of nonfrequent visitor research, the study's methods and conclusions ultimately serve as reference for future audience research that extends to museums across the field.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review situates the study within research relevant to the museum field. The chapter will first explore the affordances that museums offer to fulfill personal and cultural needs of the public – specifically regarding socialization, informal learning, and revitalization. Next, a discussion of public leisure needs will enumerate current findings related to museum visitor identities, entry motivations, and visitation frequency. Contextualizing public and visitor perceptions as influenced by interpretive design and media, the chapter then explains methodological choices made for the study. The review concludes by introducing museum literacy as a mechanism that offers visitors resources to independently manage their museum experiences.

1. Museums and Visitor Affordances

Museums increasingly rely on public support and funding; the once secondary purposes of public service and entrepreneurship supersede a singular emphasis on collections acquisition and preservation (Weil, 1999). Instead, the shift to an external focus requires museums to integrate public interests and needs in decisions related to collections, exhibitions, and programs (Doering, 1999; Weill, 1999). Since their transformation from private collections of elite members of society, alongside libraries, museums serve as repositories of the public memory (Stapp, 1984). Through collections maintenance and interpretation, museums reflect the human inclination to value material culture (Dominiczak, 2016). And in turn, the public holds museums as guardians of the human experience and therefore socially responsible for communicating these stories to their visitors (Bedigan, 2016).

By serving as mediators of knowledge and information to the public, museums encourage independent, personal growth through forging new connections and engaging forms of meaning making (Doering, 1999; Kelly, 2007). Although the practical needs for financial stability influence the decisions behind museum work, museums are ultimately positioned as benefactors of social good and transformation by their public and visitor-oriented missions (Davis, 2016). Moreover, voices in the field highlight institutional attention to contemporary issues and visitor needs as key to maintaining relevancy and public support for museums (Macleod, 2005; Maher et al. 2011; Czajkowski & Hill, 2008). Simultaneously, museums grapple with competing against the convenience and ubiquity of digital access to information (Usherwood et al., 2005). Within this context, marketing the unique benefits of museum services and assessing public perceptions of these efforts proves vital.

a. Socialization, Informal Learning, and Revitalization

As institutions that offer leisure-time activities, museums support public encounters with resources that satisfy human needs for socialization, learning, and revitalization (Doering, 1999; Cohen, 2004; Rand, 2001). Described by the concept of social capital, norms, networks, and social trust facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit and result in greater civic engagement and community identity (Putnam, 1995). Research on social relationships has also found that the presence or relative absence of social relationships affects health behaviors (Cohen, 2004; Umberson et al., 2010).

Encompassing a range of personal actions that affect health, disability, and mortality, health behaviors can have positive or negative consequences (Umberson et al., 2010). Research on positive health behaviors related to socialization have found that social activities can benefit psychological wellness. For example, the model of stress buffering asserts that social

connections benefit health through the exchange of resources needed for stress relief as a form of social support (Cohen, 2004). In contrast, the main-effect model argues that social connection benefits individuals regardless of feeling stressed by encouraging social integration. While social support relieves stress by providing solutions, changing perceptions of stressors, or distracting the subject, social integration calls individuals to participate in a social network with community norms.

Following the motivation to fulfill a specific, personal interest, a recent study on public perceptions found socialization to be the second most referenced reason for visiting museums (Mercier, 2017). The preliminary nature of Mercier's study however, sought to find general trends distinguishing frequent and nonfrequent museum visitors rather than determine broadly applicable characteristics. As a result, the study's findings represent a small sample size of 93 participants whose responses pertain to museums generally, not specific to discipline or type. The limited scale and non-specific language of the study warrant more robust research that investigates public motivations by discipline or type.

Museums as spaces that offer opportunities for initiating and enhancing social relationships offer their visitors chances to relieve stress and feelings of loneliness through pleasant interactions (Weiss, 1974). Understanding that without social ties, distress emerges and health fails, social connection seems to be a biological imperative that influences health across the course of life (Umberson et al., 2010). For example, ties to community centers such as schools are associated with healthy behavior through adolescence and positive influence continues into adulthood with participation with community service and engagement (Umberson et al., 2010). Moreover, social interaction and conversation are known to enhance the experiences of museum visitors as individuals can increase the availability of social ties by

improving ties within existing social networks or by nurturing peripheral ties within the greater community (Cohen, 2004; Holliday et al., 2014; Leinhardt et al. 2003; Kuflik et al. 2001).

Consequently, research on ways to support intragroup communication has increased as groups of visitors often arrive to a museum together, separate and rejoin according to individual interests and walking paths and could benefit from having options to stay in contact throughout their museum visit (Kuflik et al., 2001).

As visitors often talk within their social groups, to strangers, and floor staff during their museum experience, research has found that conversations are also related to both the process and outcome of museum learning (Leinhardt et al., 2003; Holliday et al., 2014; Mortensen, 2011). Sociocultural theories of learning emphasize a collaborative process of participating as social community members (Lave & Wenger, 2002). Furthermore, the social behavior of speech plays an essential role in personal cognitive development and community practices (Vygotsky, 1978). In a study comparing museum strategies, although a docent-led tour supplied participants with information, when discussion was discouraged in exchange for singular attention on the tour guide and time for questions was limited (Holliday, Lederman, & Lederman, 2014). The study found that when given adequate time for reflection and independence to accomplish educational objectives, participants increasingly collaborated on activities and participated in personal and content-related conversations.

A common sentiment in the field denotes education, ranging from burgeoning curiosity to scholarly research, as a unifying purpose and source of institutional relevancy for museums (Dana, 2012; Low, 2012). As informal learning environments, museum visitors engage in intrinsically motivated meaning-making in relation to their personal identities (Falk, 2001, 2006). What is referred to as informal or free-choice learning most frequently occurs outside of schools

and structured teaching environments (Falk, 2001). Furthermore, most human learning is driven by intrinsic motivation, satisfying intellectual and emotional needs and contributing to a person's self-concept or sense of identity (Falk, 2006, 2016).

With the history of museum interpretation developing from a largely didactic attempt to educate and elevate the masses by encouraging new audiences such as housewives, workers, and immigrants to visit and fund museum operations, many methods of communicating to and with visitors, through text, audio, and visual tools, convey an institutional voice (Anderson et al., 2017; Roberts, 2004). Traditional interpretation privileged this institutional voice as an omniscient authority over the content represented in museums. This association between museums as an authority on learning pervades contemporary perceptions as data reveals that people visit museums to fulfill leisure-related goals which include learning outcomes (Falk, 2016).

Besides acting as informal learning environments, museums also offer visitors outlets for creativity, engagement, and reflection (Black, 2011; Skydsgaard et al., 2016). Visitors are known to seek contemplative, spiritual, and restorative experiences during their leisure time and utilize museums as escapes from the obligations of daily life (Falk, 2016). Experiences of revitalization are often also described as energizing and inspirational, evolving from feeling focused and present (Rand, 1996).

b. Art museums, specifically

The introduction of museums in America recalled traditional wunderkammer or cabinets of curiosities that were popular in Europe (Weil, 2002). This style of display and arrangement sought to evoke a sense of wonder and awe rather than educate according to traditional disciplines such as science, natural history, or art. In the 19th and 20th centuries, American

museums served as places for academic reflection for members of the wealthy, upper class (Cameron, 1971; Dana, 1917; Low, 1942; Weil, 2002). As such, the main function and relevance of art museums manifested in acquiring and keeping objects of art (Dana, 1917).

In the mid-20th century, a growing swell of nationalism fueled the creation of more museums across America at a rate surpassing federal means of support (Conn, 2010; Low, 1942; Weill, 2002). The rise of interpretation and general education in American museums sought to increase public interest and funding, competing with collecting practices and care as institutional priorities (Mayer, 2005; Weill, 2002). While art museums implemented interpretation as a purpose, its relevance mainly hinged upon advertising public access and nurturing a source of revenue in support of art collecting (Colbert, 1961; Low, 1942; Weil, 2002).

In 1992, the American Alliance of Museums proclaimed that education was the primary function of museums and that each museum's mission statement and activities should clearly demonstrate a commitment to this public service (Hirzy, 1992). The majority of art museums have since incorporated this commitment, if not without struggling to balance the priorities of artists, traditional patrons of the arts, and the general public (Korn, 2007; Mayer, 1998; Weil, 2002). As such, visiting an art museum became associated with admiring art, learning facts about artists and pieces of artwork, and experiencing culture (Fisher, 2018).

2. Public Leisure Needs and Museums

Individuals consider available time outside of work and obligatory commitments leisure time (Miller, 2011). Leisure needs are thereby defined as the activities people personally desire to participate in during this time. While seeking environmental novelty and stimulating curiosity is an innate human characteristic, prioritizing and deciding on contemporary leisure activities is

more complicated than before (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Black, 2011). As leisure time is increasingly fragmented due to growing work commitments of dual-income households and greater diversity in leisure offerings, non-holiday attendance at cultural sites and events have declined (Black, 2011). Studies evaluating leisure and tourism industries note the importance of emotions and personal connection for public attraction and satisfaction (Bedigan, 2016). Consequently, key competitors have created unique brand identities and images to distinguish themselves from the overly saturated market (Bonn et al., 2007).

a. Visitor identities, motivations, visitation frequency

Research reveals that the public currently visits museums to satisfy a diversity of leisure-related goals and the nature of these goals depends on each visitor's individual self-concept and perceptions of museums (Falk, 2016). In response, recent literature resists relying solely on traditional ways of studying and characterizing museum visitors within demographic categories, instead contextualizing visitors within psychographic information such as personal attitudes and motivations (Weiser, 2016; Falk, 2016; Leschenko, 2016). As visitors are known to pre-structure their visits according to personal expectations and with the whole process of deciding whether to visit a museum occurring outside its physical space, visitor research that focuses solely on experiences within museums is limited accordingly (Falk, 2016; Tröndle, 2014). Moreover, the over-reliance of analyzing visitors by demographics such as age, ethnicity/race, gender, and socio-economic class ignores crucial information regarding likelihood of visiting, expectations of museum experiences, and personal interests.

A risk of visitor research culminates in the tendency to discuss museum visitors "as a whole" or as averages (Falk, 2016; Leschenko, 2016). Museum practitioners and researchers should understand and discuss visitors as many individuals, each with their unique traits and

needs (Leschenko, 2016). One such attempt to replace traditional demographic categories describes “museum identities” that individuals enact throughout their museum experience (Falk, 2006). Related to, but separate from the self-concept, museum identities serve as vehicles with which visitors approach and experience museums.

Research on visitors’ expectations and reported satisfaction resulted in seven, previously five, clusters of identity-related motivations (Falk, 2006; 2016). The museum identities, known as *explorers*, *facilitators*, *professionals/hobbyists*, *experience seekers*, *rechargers*, *respectful pilgrims*, and *affinity seekers*, distinguish specific guiding motivations (Falk, 2016). According to Falk, the category of *explorers* describes visitors who are curiosity-driven with generic interest in the content of a museum. In contrast, *affinity seekers* are driven by specific interests in museums or exhibitions that they perceive as relevant to their personhood. According to Falk, visitors who demonstrate the *professional/hobbyist* motivation perceive a close relationship between their personal passions and a museum’s content while *facilitators* are socially motivated visitors who are focused on enabling the experiences and learning of others in their visiting group. Additionally, visitors who are *experience seekers* are motivated to visit primarily because they view museums as important destinations or culturally significant and similarly, visitors who feel obligated to visit museums due to a sense of duty or desire to honor those represented are distinguished as *respectful pilgrims*. For Falk, the category of *rechargers* refers to visitors who seek contemplative, restorative experiences and perceive that a museum visit affords them opportunities for those experiences.

Understanding that museum identities are specific to particular visits and instances within museum experiences, individuals can enact any combination or movement between museum identities without restriction (Falk, 2006). Separating and studying visitors according to their

entering and enacted identities results in descriptive data potentially predictive of visitors' use of and satisfaction with museums (Falk, 2016). Unlike demographic categories, museum identities are not permanent qualities of individuals, but rather illustrate the dynamism and variety of public reactions to museum offerings.

Museum identities or identity-related motivations, as they are currently situated in the field's discourse, refer to perspectives and actions linked to engagement during a museum visit. Therefore, the discussion of museum identities is bound by the constraints of time spent within museum spaces. The behavior of visiting museums and personally identifying as a museum visitor demonstrates a sense of community and intrinsic motivation not captured in standard demographic data. Therefore, museum identities are related to the concept of cultural capital that proposes that the acquisition of developed tastes, mannerisms, and qualifications shared between members of the same social class creates a collective identity and sense of hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital manifests in the phenomena of individuals identifying themselves by their relationship to museums. As informal learning environments, museums can effectively develop and validate positive subject-specific interests, skills, emotions, and identities (Bell et al., 2009). Thus, the conscious decision of identifying as 'a museum person' or specifically 'an art museum person,' signals to others an internalized set of experiences, knowledge, and prestige related to museum visitation.

The concept of museum identities, however more accurate and useful compared to traditional demographic categories, may also overly simplify visitors' individual complexity (Weiser, 2016). Furthermore, ignoring the nuance and autonomy of individual visitors promotes ineffective, vague messaging that might confuse the public's perceptions of museum experiences (Schmitt, 2016). In contrast, "identity as action" encompasses museums and their visitors within

a community of discourse. By actively engaging to build common narratives and sense of self, individuals invoke their own group identities which situate the self within the greater society. As public settings, museums serve as arenas of social contact in which people can accumulate and flaunt cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

As people utilize their leisure time to satisfy personal desires, people who visit museums freely therefore perceive positive alignment between their leisure time needs and museum offerings or affordances (Falk, 2016). As museums serve personal and community relational roles within society, people have developed working models of what museums are like and preconceive what a potential visit affords them (Falk, 2016; Tröndle, 2014). Although motivations to visit museums are never fixed and are determined by immediate self-related needs and context, without perceiving satisfactory alignment between museum affordances and personal leisure needs, members of the public opt to spend their leisure time elsewhere (Falk, 2016).

Research on visitation frequency found that frequent museum visitors emphasize the benefits a museum provides their community, using strong, descriptive language (Mercier, 2017). In contrast, occasional visitors exhibited similar positive associations in addition to expressing a large variety of barriers to visiting museums. The study found that non-visitors strongly associate museums with feelings of boredom and disappointment. With changing leisure time availability and changing leisure needs, museums must build more positive associations and reduce barriers to visitation (Miller, 2011).

b. Visitor Expectations of Art Museums

Art museums and their exhibitions have fostered and accommodated different modalities of walking, looking, sitting, and talking since their creation (Leahy, 2012). Art was not always

presented along a single line upon white walls, rather in the grand salons across Europe paintings were stacked high and clustered together (Kelly, 2017). The techniques of art museums involve knowing how to look at art, awareness of how and where to stand, appropriate pacing of movement through a gallery, and acceptable forms of socializing (Leahy, 2012). Through a series of experiences, whether firsthand or recounted, art museum visitors acquire habits that reflect familiarity with the logistic and social operations of the museum (Leah, 2012).

3. Public and Visitor Perceptions of Museums

While the public expresses strong emotional support for museums and their role in their communities, museum visitation is declining (BritainThinks, 2013; LaPlace Cohen, 2017). Although most community members are not frequent visitors, regardless of visitation the public positively and generally regards museums as important cultural centers (American Alliance of Museums & Wilkening, 2018; BritainThinks, 2013; Pettit & DiMaggio, 1997). Additionally, despite a lack of active support, nonfrequent visitors consider museums as guardians of community heritage and culture in addition to contributing important public value for the community (BritainThinks, 2013; Stylianou-Lamber, 2011; Yocco et al., 2009).

As the self-concepts of visitors and their opinions of museums combine and inform their expectations of museum experiences, visitor motivations influence the criteria through which people judge the success of their visit (Falk, 2016). This dialogic feedback loop feeds into a person's perceived relationship with museums and further shapes society's shared understanding of what visiting museums entails. Exploring personal and societal definitions of museum experiences therefore requires understanding the nature of human perception, especially the potential effects of museum-related stimuli.

As individuals make sense of the external world by absorbing new and familiar information through their physical senses and contextualizing their perceptions among pre-existing knowledge, all understanding of all external stimuli is highly subjective (Leschenko, 2016; Skydsgaard et al., 2016). Additionally, as visitors interact with the physical characteristics of museums – their architectural and spatial design in addition to their social dimension – the elements within museums combine to create affect or emotional responses that influence visitor perceptions (Forrest, 2013; Tröndle, 2014). For example, visitors distracted by the echoing footsteps and conversations of other guests in exhibition spaces have been found to perceive their visit as less satisfactory, experiencing loss of focus and energy (Jakubowski et al., 2011).

a. Museum Literacy

Centering the experiences and perceptions of visitors manifests through the organizational policy and design choices that encourage rather than inhibit people from developing museum literacy (Stapp, 1984; Falk, 2016). By likening the potential of museum experiences to language literacy, recognizing visitors' full agency and creativity necessitates clear definitions and depth of accessibility (Stapp, 1984). Approaching museum work through the lens of strengthening visitors' comfort and excellence in navigating their experiences pairs well with voices in the field calling for increased collaboration between museums and their users (Black, 2011; Davis, 2011; Bedigan, 2011).

A combination of education and curatorial practice, fostering a museum literate public empowers visitors and sparks rich, intellectual participation (Stapp, 1984). By recognizing and assisting visitors as agents over their experiences, museums incorporate them into the process of interpretation (Jacobs, 2009). Rather than restricting visitor experiences as passive and objective, including visitors within the design and function of their visit enhances personal meaning-

making (Black, 2011; Bedigan, 2011). As the public desires to feel more connected with their experienced environments, there is an increased need to accommodate preference and customization as performed by the user (Bedigan, 2011).

Building museum literacy avoids alienating visitors and instead encourages members of the public to encounter museums fully by rejecting practices that exclude and complicate comprehension. When in dialogue with their visitors, museums respect visitors' individual agency and capacity to utilize museum content meaningfully (Falk, 2016). A visitor-centric perspective also shifts museum exhibitions beyond the realm of passive absorption into spaces for social and corporeal practices (Soares, 2016). Museum exhibitions that facilitate contact between individuals and novel experiences trigger emotional responses and can potentially transform social relationships (Thobo-Carsen, 2016). Exhibitions also affect and move visitors in ways that introduce alternative ways of knowing, connecting, and being together in museums. As design principles at work in museum exhibitions – such as curiosity, challenge, narratives, and participation – often exert joint impact on visitor experience, a participative museum body is dynamic and requires visitors' openness (Skydsgaard et al., 2016; Thobo-Carsen, 2016). Otherwise, visitors are less likely to be affected and engage in creative thinking or actions.

b. Affects of Atmospherics

The philosophy of museum literacy also involves the conscious designing of space, known as atmospherics. Atmospherics specifically describes the effort to design space to produce attention, message comprehension, and physiological emotional responses or affect (Kotler, 1973). Beyond the textual information of labels and verbal instruction of floor staff presented in museum exhibitions, the colors, sounds, and textures of the environment are known to impact visitors (Brenner, 2016; Gorton, 2017). Additionally, research has found that

atmospheric design elements do not exist as isolated variables but like design principles, affect visitors in conjunction with each other (Regan, 2014).

Places of interwoven spatial and social layers, museums are demarcated by physical walls and subdivided by individually designed gallery spaces that house any number of visitors. External facades and internal architecture are reminiscent of historical styles and reflect certain auras that project a sense of atmospheric space associated with certain perceptions and connotations (Tröndle, 2014). Additionally, the cumulative presence or absence of other visitors unpredictably contributes to the sounds and available space of an exhibition (Kelly, 2017). Research in environmental psychology suggests that people either exhibit approach or avoidance behaviors in reaction to their environments (Bonn et al., 2007). While approach behaviors encapsulate the desire to stay and explore, atmospheric elements such as traffic flow and noise level are known to detract from that desire (Bonn et al., 2007; Jakubowski et al., 2011).

c. Perceptions of Art Museums

While art museums are evaluating their role in communities and committing themselves to facilitating and researching visitor learning, annual attendance for art museums is declining particularly among younger demographics (Mason & McCarthy, 2006; National Endowment for the Arts, 2013; 2015). While the general public generally regards museums positively, contemporary perceptions about art museums suggest that people may still have negative associations related to visiting them (Fisher, 2018). As art museums historically served educated, upper class members of society, the public has often criticized them as being elitist, exclusive, and ultimately irrelevant to general audiences (Dana, 1917; Conn, 2010).

4. **Summary**

Museums serve as more than collectors and repositories of the human experience. By interpreting and sharing cultural narratives with their visitors, museums devote spaces for the public to satisfy their leisure needs – especially those of socialization, informal learning, and revitalization. Specifically, museum experiences afford visitors diverse opportunities for initiating and enhancing social relationships, developing personal and shared learning experiences, and engaging in reflective and restorative activities. With such an external focus, museums rely on positive public perceptions to remain relevant and therefore must investigate and integrate public interests and needs within institutional decisions.

Efforts to understand the public have found that the public visits museums to satisfy identity-related motivations and that the decision follows a perceived positive alignment between these personal needs and the experiences they expect a museum visit affords them. Research on the public is lacking however, as it primarily focuses on the perceptions of frequent visitors during their museum visit even though the public's identity development, perceptions of museums, and decision-making largely culminate before visiting and outside of museum spaces.

While the public does perceive museums as important cultural centers for their communities, visitation is declining – especially for art museums among younger, more diverse audiences – in part because of less available public leisure time and increased leisure options that offer similar affordances as museums. If art museums are to be competitive among other leisure options and attract broader audiences, they must adapt to what motivates the leisure time activities of nonfrequent visitors and their current perceptions of art museums.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Purpose

This study was designed to capture information about contemporary opinions of nonfrequent visitors related to art museums and contribute to the field's broader understanding of the public. Nonfrequent visitors, as defined by the study, have not visited an art museum more than once within the last two years. The purpose of this study was to explore what perceptions this public audience associates with visiting art museums and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums?
2. To what characteristics of art museums do nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions?

Research Design

Existing literature on contemporary public perceptions associated with art museums typically relies on responses from frequent visitors within art museum spaces. As nonfrequent visitors populate museums less often than their counterparts, the study's descriptive survey design sought to combat their underrepresentation in previous studies. Qualitative methods used in the study were chosen to yield in depth answers and personal insight into individual participant responses. In contrast, quantitative data allows for numerical categorization and analysis of overarching trends. Capturing both qualitative and quantitative measurements, the study sought to illustrate an in-depth understanding of nonfrequent visitor perceptions of art museums.

Site Selection

Pursuing a detailed understanding of nonfrequent visitor perceptions required frequenting locations of leisure activities outside of museum spaces. Nineteen sites were selected to reflect different geographical neighborhoods located in the greater Seattle region. Criteria for site selection was as follows:

1. Non-art museum setting
2. Relative distance from major Seattle art museums

These criteria were chosen to maximize the likelihood of encountering nonfrequent art museum visitors and minimize bias related to demographic or socioeconomic background that could impact the generalizability of findings.

The first criterion for site selection specifies that data collection locations were outside of the physical walls and areas associated with art museums in the greater Seattle region. Selecting non-art museum settings prioritized encountering non-frequent art museum visitors. Moreover, conducting interviews outside of art museum affiliated spaces ensured that public perceptions were not actively influenced by museum-related stimuli such as architecture, exhibition design or content, and visitors.

The next requirement considered the relative proximity of sites to art museums and their surrounding areas. The process of selecting sites necessitated an awareness of public accessibility to visiting Seattle art museums. As a result, sites do not represent populations around downtown Seattle and the neighborhood of Capitol Hill. Individuals at both locations have art museums such as the Seattle Art Museum, the Frye Art Museum, and Seattle Asian Art Museum within walking distance. Additionally, the cultural attractions available in downtown Seattle draw tourists who may be more likely to be frequent art museum visitors.

Coffeeshops located in the Chinatown-International District, Wallingford, Fremont, Greenwood, Ballard, and Mount Baker neighborhoods met these criteria and explicit permission from employees was obtained prior to the start of data collection. Additionally, coffeeshops and one public library in the suburbs of Burien and Redmond acted as additional sites to reach subjects further from downtown Seattle. Despite the proximity of the Henry Art Gallery to coffeeshops located near the University of Washington's main campus, four coffeeshops on University Way acted as sites to capture perceptions of younger adult demographics.

Subject Selection and Recruitment

Potential participants included any individuals visibly over the age of 18 years old and fluent in the English language. The researcher selected participants using convenience sampling at each site and approached the majority of people present at each site. Individuals were informed of the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. After obtaining verbal consent, potential participants were asked about their recent visitation history related to art museums. Individuals stating that they have not been to an art museum in the last two years or have visited at most once per year in that time range, were eligible to complete the full interview. Individuals who reported visiting art museums in the last two years more than once per year were exempt from the study. A refusal log was kept to record individuals exempt from participating because of visitation frequency exceeding the study's criteria.

Study Methods

Self-reported qualitative and quantitative data were collected through participant interviews. The semi-structured interview consisted of a facilitated questionnaire that used both

open and close-ended questions designed to understand nonfrequent visitor perceptions. Interviews were conducted to record participant's motivations related to preferred leisure time activities, measure the participant's attitude towards visiting art museums, and build an understanding of how closely participants associate art museums with socializing, learning, and revitalization.

The researcher guided participants through interview questions and recorded responses on printed copies of the questionnaire (See Appendix A). Participants self-completed quantitative descriptive and intensity measures on a laminated instrument tool (See Appendices B & C). For all components of the study's interview, participants could give multiple responses for each question. The researcher copied participants' self-completed responses onto the corresponding questionnaire concurrently or shortly after finishing the interview. Participants also filled out demographic fields on the questionnaire according to their discretion.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted interviews throughout the week and within the span of approximately eight weeks, beginning on February 5th and ending on March 29th, 2019. Data collection times prioritized weekends and the hours between 11:00AM – 5:00PM to capture peak foot traffic at selected sites. Interviews with individual participants lasted no longer than ten minutes, the average duration being roughly five minutes. Data collection was conducted at each site for no longer than an hour and a half at a time. The relative proximity of sites within the same neighborhood allowed the researcher to alternate locations as needed. Due to limited foot traffic at each site, convenience sampling prompted the researcher to approach most individuals

present in each location. Data represents full length interviews conducted with each qualifying participant encountered at each site.

After establishing participant verbal consent and criteria qualification, the first interview question had the participant describe their leisure time activities and explain the motivations associated with each. Next, the interview asked how the participant would describe someone who self-identifies as an ‘art museum person.’ This was done to explore how nonfrequent visitors perceive the intended audience for art museums and create a personal working definition for the participant’s reference during the subsequent questions. The participant was also asked whether they would personally consider themselves to be an ‘art museum person’ and for what reasons. This self-identified, psychographic information was captured to support collected demographic data and illuminate participants’ attitudes and aspirations.

The remaining interview questions required the participant to describe art museums with adjectives, what feelings they experience in anticipation of a visit to an art museum, and how strongly they consider art museums to be good places for socializing, learning, and revitalization activities. Participants were asked to justify their responses by designating what perceived characteristics of art museums influenced their previous answers.

Participants

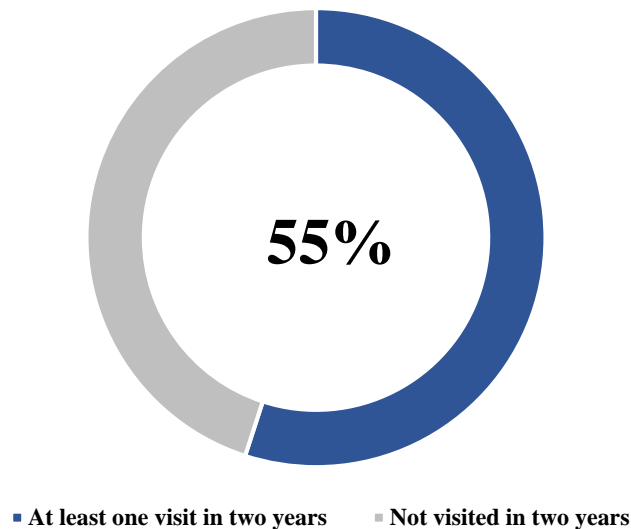
The researcher conducted 80 interviews across 19 research sites in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan area. During the process of screening for the study, 48 individuals were identified as ineligible to participate, having visited an art museum more than once a year in the last two years and were therefore deemed frequent visitors as defined by the study. Data collection resulted in 79 fully completed interviews with a singular incomplete interview

including relevant data. The participant expressed satisfaction at their contribution to the study and chose not to answer question 7 of the instrument. (See Appendix A)

Similarly, participants were not required to share demographic information such as zipcode or country, gender identity, racial or ethnic identity, and age range. This self-reported section was completed by 78 participants, one choosing to not identify ethnically or racially and the other not divulging a zipcode or country of residence. Where appropriate, the partially completed interview is included in analysis.

Figure 3.1

**Participants have visited an art museum at least once in the last two years
(n=80)**



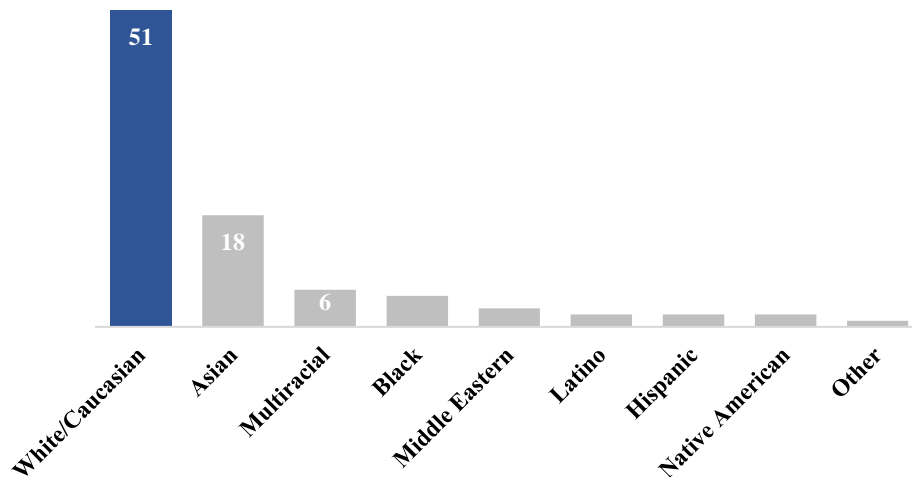
This study focuses on the perceptions of nonfrequent art museum visitors. Nonfrequent visitors, as defined by the study, have not visited an art museum more than once within the last two years. The distribution of qualifying participants who met this criteria is as follows: 45% (n=36) of participants reported not visiting an art museum at all within the last two years, 39% (n=31) reported visiting no more than once each year, and 17% (n=13) reported visiting only

once in the last two years. Therefore, at 55% (n=44), more than half of nonfrequent visitors representing the study's sample have visited an art museum at least once in the last two years.

Participants predominantly represent Seattle, Washington's King County residents. The distribution of participants by self-reported zipcode or country of residence was: 89% (n=70) from the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan area. Of which, 90% (n=63) wrote in zipcodes specific to Seattle's King County. 6 individuals wrote in zipcodes indicating residence in Snohomish County and 1 participant indicated residing in Thurston County. Both Snohomish and Thurston counties are considered part of the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area. 4 participants shared zipcodes or states of residency either outside of Washington, such as Oregon and California, or simply indicated living in the United States of America in general. 2 individuals responded with non-domestic locations, one of which was India and the other was Ethiopia.

Figure 3.2

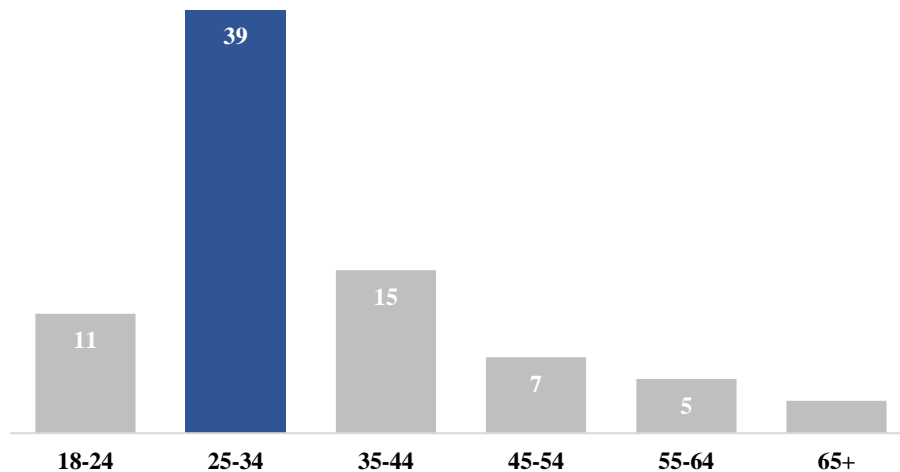
Most participants identified as White/Caucasian (n=79)



Most participants, at 64% (n=51), identified as male, with 37% (n=29) identifying as female and 1 individual identifying as nonbinary and male. The distribution of racial-ethnic identities demonstrates greater representation of White/Caucasian perceptions at 65% (n=51), followed by participants identifying as Asian at 23% (n=18), Multiracial at 8% (n=6), Black or African American at 7% (n=5), Middle Eastern at 4% (n=3), and Latino, Hispanic and Native American each at 3% (n=2). The individual participant in the Other category identified themselves as “American.” Although White/Caucasian participants make up the majority of this study’s sample, the above distribution of racial and ethnic identities closely resembles current census data for the Seattle region (American Community Survey, 2012-2016).

Figure 3.3

Most participants were between 25 – 34 years old (n=80)



Each targeted age group was represented in the sample, with 49% identifying as between the ages of 25-34 years old (n=39). 14% of participants identified as 18-24 years old (n=11), 19% were 35-44 years old (n=15), 9% were 45-54 years old (n=7), 7% were 55-64 years old (n=5), and 4% were 65 years old or older (n=3).

Data Analysis Plan

Data from all sites was combined and analyzed holistically to describe nonfrequent visitors' overall perceptions of art museums. Qualitative data was initially analyzed using emergent coding and subsequently analyzed through the existing frameworks when applicable: *Visitors' Bill of Rights* (Rand, 2001) and identity-related motivations or museum identities (Falk, 2016). Cross-analysis between emergent coding and existing frameworks sought to establish whether use of the frameworks was applicable to contemporary public perceptions of museums. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and the same pre-existing frameworks when applicable.

A combination of emergent, inductive coding and descriptive statistics was used to determine themes across participant responses. These analyses served to answer the study's two research questions, describing how nonfrequent visitors perceive art museums and to what characteristics does this public audience attribute their perceptions. Since participants could give multiple responses for each question of the study's interview, analysis reflects the total number of respondents per question and not the total number of responses. Percentages reflected in the findings do not accumulate to equal 100%, rather they reflect the portion of respondents who shared the same or similar answers per interview question.

The sample of nonfrequent visitors participating in the study is not considered to be generalizable to the greater population of the non-visiting public. Data gathered on this public audience's perceptions of art museums contributes insights to investigating identity-related visitor motivations and the relevance of museums as a leisure time activity. This research also proposes a framework for future, larger-scale studies not limited to art museums.

Limitations of the Study

A challenge comes from conducting interviews with visitors at multiple public sites. While interviews yield greater depth and quality in responses, participants are still selective with what they share, and memory is imperfect and subjective. As this study focuses on perceptions however, participant identities and subjectivity are accounted for and desired during analysis. If participants were brief or vague in their initial responses, follow-up prompts intentionally assisted individuals to clarify their answers.

Furthermore, a descriptive survey design necessitates that enough data is collected to contribute significant generalizability and application to the greater field. As foot traffic and population demographics are unpredictable prior to and during data collection, the study's sample cannot be considered as representative of Seattle's general population. While responses from 80 participants seek to highlight the breadth of public perceptions, the study focuses solely on the perceptions of nonfrequent art museum visitors. The study's findings cannot be considered as comprehensive, instead serving as a reference for future research in this area.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the descriptive survey designed to explore what perceptions, if any, nonfrequent visitors associate with visiting art museums. Nonfrequent visitors, as defined by the study, have not visited an art museum more than once within the last two years. The results provide answers to the following research questions: 1. How do nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums? and 2. To what characteristics of art museums do nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions?

For all components of the study's interview, participants could give multiple responses for each question. Therefore, analysis reflects the total number of respondents per question and not the total number of responses. Percentages reflected in the findings do not accumulate to equal 100%, rather they reflect the portion of respondents who shared the same or similar answers per interview question.

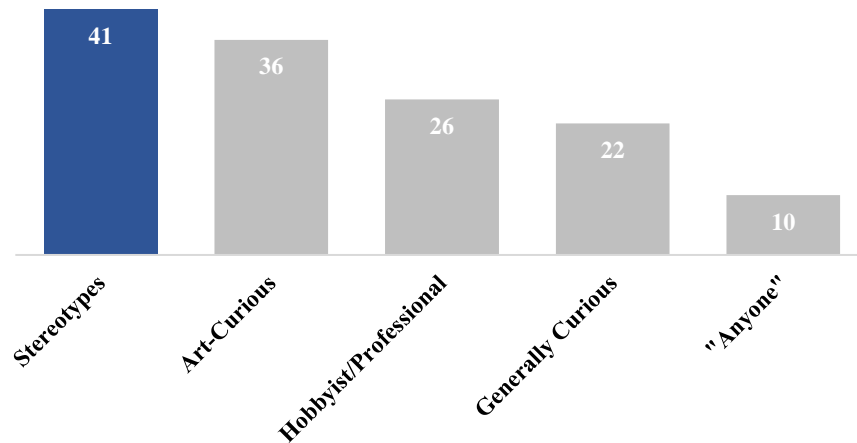
1. How do nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums?

Perceived Intended Audience

The study framed intended audiences of art museums as 'art museum persons.' The term 'art museum person' is a self-identification that refers to when an individual identifies strongly with art museums and visiting them. The interview introduced the concept of 'art museum persons' to participants and asked them to describe perceived characteristics of this audience group.

Figure 4.1

Half of participants used stereotypes to describe an 'art museum person.'
(n=80)



52% (n=41) of participants responded by characterizing 'art museums persons' according to stereotypes. These stereotypes included references to higher social class or wealth, high visitation frequency, or older age demographics. Four participants mentioned race as a characteristic, specifically describing 'art museum persons' as White, and three participants associated the identity with tourists. 45% (n=36) of participants described 'art museum persons' as "art-curious" and interested in or knowledgeable about art, 33% (n=26) described art hobbyists and professionals, 28% (n=22) described people who are generally curious, and 10 participants maintained that anyone could be an 'art museum person.'

The responses to this interview question demonstrate that participants perceive art museum persons in ways that include Falk's museum identities but are not limited to them. Of these categories, only three closely resemble the identity-related motivations of *explorers*, *professionals/hobbyists*, and *affinity seekers* (Falk, 2016). *Explorers* are defined as visitors who are driven by curiosity and a general interest in museum content. Therefore, the third of participants who perceive the intended audience of art museums as "generally curious" imagine

typical art museum individuals as having “explorer-like” motivations. Similarly, another third of participants described people who feel connected to museum content through their professional or hobbyist identities. In this study, the category of “art-curious” can be interpreted as *affinity seekers* who are motivated by their sense of personhood.

Figure 4.2
The majority of participants did not identify as 'art museum persons.' (n=80)

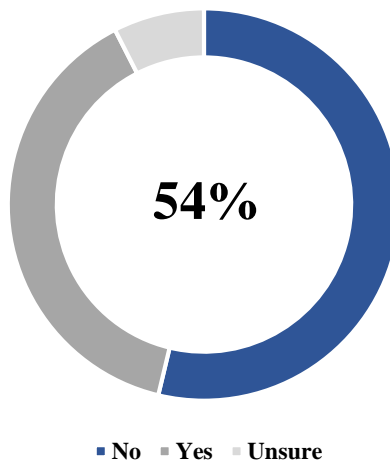
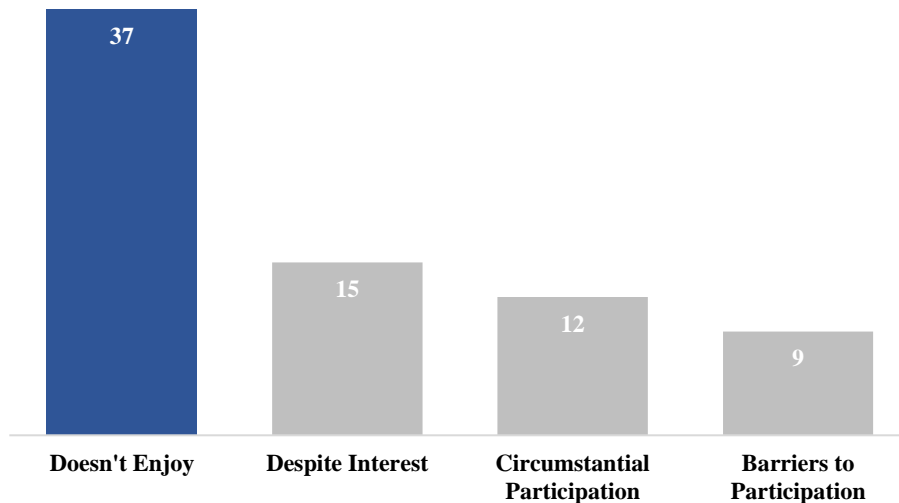


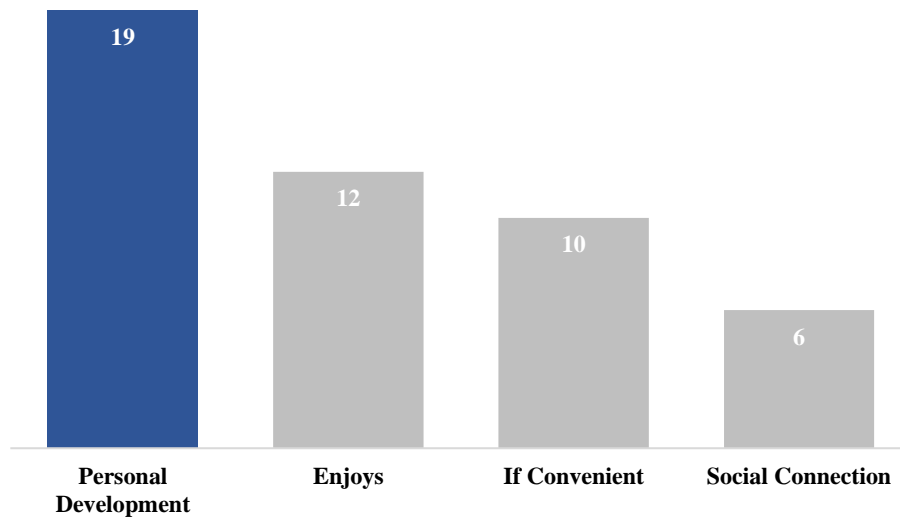
Figure 4.3
The majority of participants who do not identify as 'art museum persons' attribute it to lack of enjoyment. (n=43)



When asked if they considered themselves art museum persons, 54% (n=43) of participants did not consider themselves ‘art museum persons’ with the majority of these individuals (87%, n=37) citing a lack of enjoyment or disappointment experienced during an art museum visit. 35% (n=15) of ‘non-art museum persons’ considered themselves such despite interest and enjoyment in visiting art museums. 28% (n=12) admitted to circumstantial participation, only visiting to accompany friends or family, and 21% (n=9) described barriers to participation such as lack of time or money, without which they perceived hindered the development of this identity.

Figure 4.4

Participants who identify as ‘art museum persons’ associate visiting with personal development. (n=31)



39% (n=31) of participants considered themselves ‘art museum persons.’ Of these individuals, 62% (n=19) associated visiting art museums with personal development. For this response, participants perceived visiting as cultivating casual or professional interests related to art or topics represented in art museums. 39% (n=12) of ‘art museum persons’ mentioned

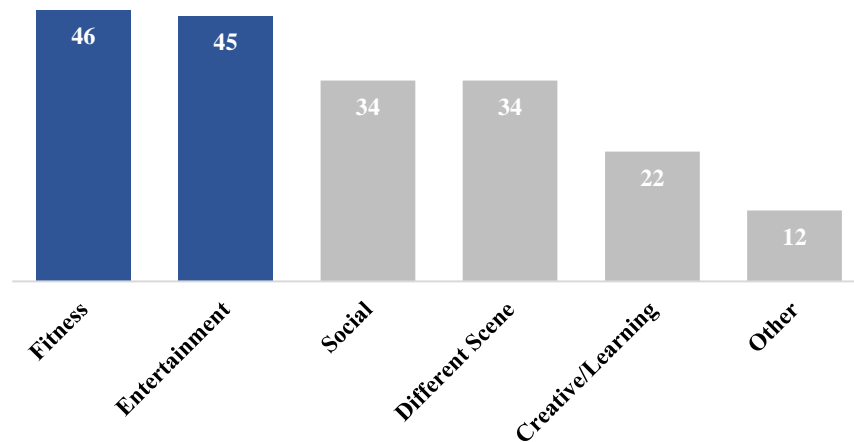
enjoying the experience of visiting art museums, 33% (n=10) expressed interest in visiting “if convenient,” on the condition that they had the opportunity and resources, and 20% (n=6) mentioned a social connection with someone who positively contributed to this identity. For this response, participants associated visiting art museums with memories of other ‘art museum persons’ in their life with whom they have visited.

Leisure Time and Visiting Art Museums

The study asked nonfrequent visitors how they typically spend their leisure time or time otherwise not occupied by work obligations. Analysis of responses sought to enhance understanding of nonfrequent visitors’ leisure time behaviors and priorities.

Figure 4.5

Most participants spend their leisure time on fitness and entertainment. (n=80)

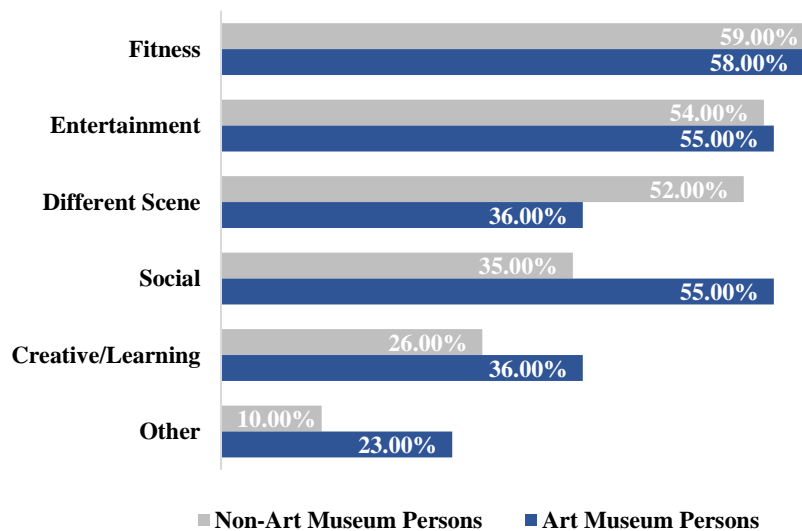


At nearly equal response rates, 58% (n=46) of participants cited activities associated with fitness such as hiking or biking and 57% (n=45) described consuming forms of entertainment like reading or watching television. Both at 43% (n=34), the second leading leisure time

activities were socializing with others and seeking a different scene such as being outdoors in nature or going to restaurants and coffeeshops. 28% (n=22) of participants mentioned participating in creative outlets or learning such as writing, knitting, or researching personal interests.

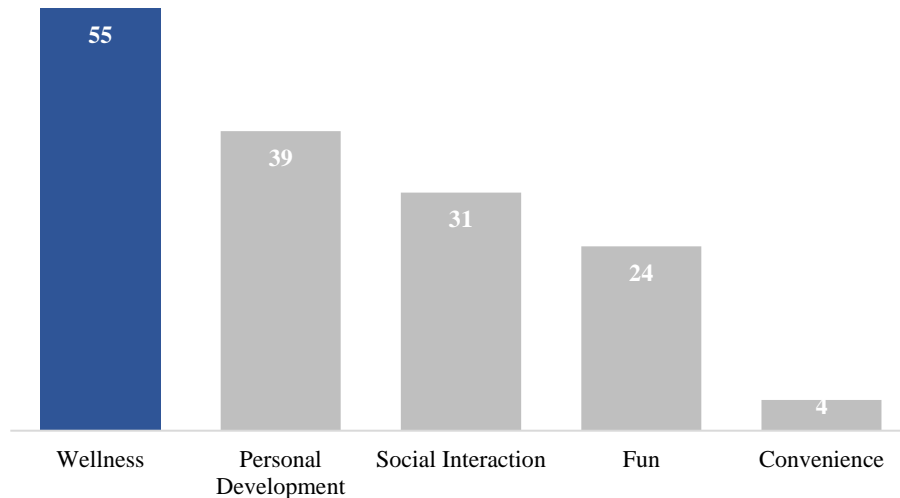
Figure 4.6

Participants who identify as ‘art museum persons’ are more likely to spend leisure time on social activities. (n=80)



Between participants who did or did not self-identify as ‘art museum persons,’ one discernible difference was the popularity of social activities. At 55% (n=17), social activities were the most popular leisure time activity, followed by fitness for ‘art museum persons’ compared to 35% (n=15) of ‘non-art museum persons.’ For ‘non-art museum persons,’ the most popular leisure activity was fitness (59%, n=25) followed by entertainment (54%, n=23), and seeking a different scene (52%, n=22), with social activities the fourth most popular. For both groups, participants reported engaging in creative and learning activities the least often. ‘Non-art museums persons’ were also more likely to spend leisure time seeking a different scene, whereas ‘art museum persons’ more often reported spending leisure time on creativity and learning.

Figure 4.7

Most participants use leisure time for wellness (n=80)

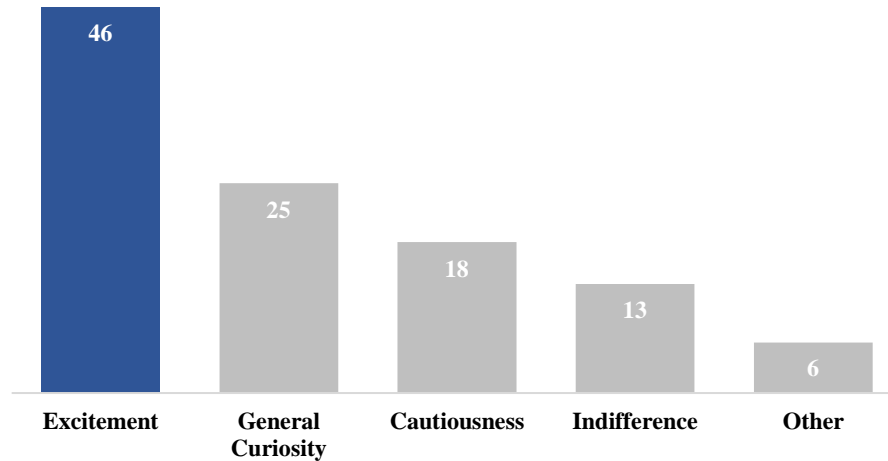
When asked the reasons for participating in their typical leisure time activities, 69% (n=55) of all participants included wellness benefits such as improving physical health or reducing stress. The second most common reason for leisure time activities was personal development at 49% (n=39). Responses in this category referenced satisfying personal interests or achieving a sense of growth. For 39% (n=31) of participants, leisure time activities allow for social interaction. Similarly, 30% (n=24) emphasized that their leisure time activities were fun and enjoyable. Only 5% (n=4) of participants mentioned convenience, ease of access, or low cost as reasons for their leisure time activities.

Of these motivations behind leisure time activities, only three can be interpreted as resembling the museum identities of *facilitator*, *professional/hobbyist*, and *recharger* (Falk, 2016). Much like *facilitators*, nearly a quarter of participants spend their leisure time motivated by social experiences. The study's category of "personal development" relates closely to the motivations of *professional/hobbyist*-like visitors who seek specific content relevant to their

individual passions and interests. “Wellness” as the most represented category in the study captures a motivation for healing and restorative experiences, much like *rechargers*.

Figure 4.8

Most participants express excitement at the prospect of visiting art museums (n=80)



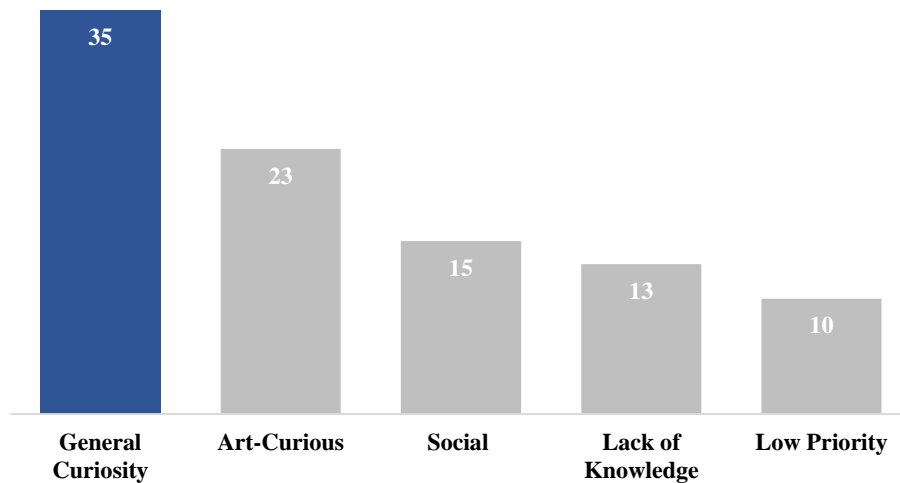
After nonfrequent visitors reflected on their preferred or typical leisure time activities, the interview asked that participants imagine an upcoming visit to an art museum and share what feelings, if any, they expected to experience beforehand. 58% (n=46) of participants divulged emotions of excitement and anticipation, 32% (n=25) described feeling a general sense of curiosity or openness, and 23% (n=18) expressed feelings of cautiousness or anxiety. Participants whose responses fit in this category demonstrated uncertainty over what to expect from visiting an art museum, weariness, or fear. 13 participants (17%) responded that they would feel have feelings of indifference and 6 participants (8%) mentioned other feelings such as superiority or nostalgia.

Analysis for this question found no discernible difference between ‘art museum persons’ and ‘non-art museum persons’ in the order of categories. Regardless, the most commonly

expressed feelings were excitement followed by general curiosity, cautiousness, and indifference. Participants self-identifying as ‘non-art museum persons’ however, more often expressed associating the feeling of indifference with visiting art museums (26%, n=11) than ‘art museum persons’ (7%, n=2). Furthermore, 71% (n=22) of ‘art museum persons’ predicted feeling excitement as compared to 47% (n=20) of ‘non-art museum persons.’

Figure 4.9

Participants attribute their feelings towards visiting art museums to general curiosity. (n=80)



When asked to elaborate on the reasons behind their anticipated emotions, 44% (n=35) of participants explained that visiting an art museum was an opportunity to see something new or extraordinary apart from daily routine. 29% (n=23) specifically mentioned expectations related to developing personal interests or knowledge of art. These participants associated visiting art museums with purposefully seeing or experiencing art with the intention of feeling personally connected. 15 participants (19%) explained the social nature of their experience with art museums. Responses in this category focused on enjoying the company of those on the art visit with them, deemphasizing art museums as the venue for socializing. 13 participants (17%)

expressed a lack of knowledge surrounding art museum offerings, acceptable behaviors, or types of art represented. 10 participants (13%) stated that visiting art museums is a low priority in their lives and articulated preferences for other leisure activities.

Nonfrequent Visitors Describe Art Museums

The interview asked nonfrequent visitors what adjectives, of the options listed below, they believe describe art museums generally. The study measured adjectives related to Judy Rand's *Visitors' Bill of Rights* (Rand, 2001). Each set of rows in the table below pertains to the three public leisure time needs in the order of *socialization*, *learning*, and *rejuvenation*. 8 participants (10%) offered alternative adjectives such as "inspiring," "exclusive," and "introspective."

Table 1

Most participants describe art museums as quiet, interesting, calming, and knowledgeable (n=80)

<i>Socializing</i>	Loud	Quiet	Friendly	Intimidating	Isolating	Inclusive
	5	67	26	18	13	20
<i>Learning</i>	Clear	Confusing	Ignorant	Knowledgeable	Interesting	Boring
	14	20	3	52	63	14
<i>Revitalizing</i>	Energizing	Exhausting	Calming	Stressful	Exciting	Low energy
	26	11	60	2	23	23

During the interview, 84% (n=67) of participants selected the adjective ‘quiet,’ 79% (n=63) think of art museums as ‘interesting,’ 75% (n=60) perceive them to be ‘calming,’ and 65% (n=52) find them ‘knowledgeable.’ Beyond the most popular responses, 33% (n=26) of nonfrequent visitors described art museums as ‘friendly,’ whereas nearly a quarter of participants (23%, n=18) described them as ‘intimidating.’ Similarly, 33% (n=26) and 29% (n=23) of participants described art museums as respectively ‘energizing’ and ‘exciting.’ Meanwhile nearly a third of participants (29%, n=23) perceived them as ‘low energy.’

25% (n=20) of participants considered art museums ‘inclusive’ as compared to the 17% (n=13) who described them as ‘isolating.’ Additionally, 25% (n=20) of nonfrequent visitors admitted to finding art museums ‘confusing,’ while 18% (n=14) declared them to be ‘clear.’ 18% (n=14) and 14% (n=11) of participants described art museums as ‘boring’ and ‘exhausting,’ respectively. The least commonly chosen adjectives were ‘loud’ at 7% (n=5), ‘ignorant’ at 4% (n=3), and stressful at 3% (n=2).

Table 2
Responses from ‘non-art museum persons’ demonstrate a similar distribution (n=43)

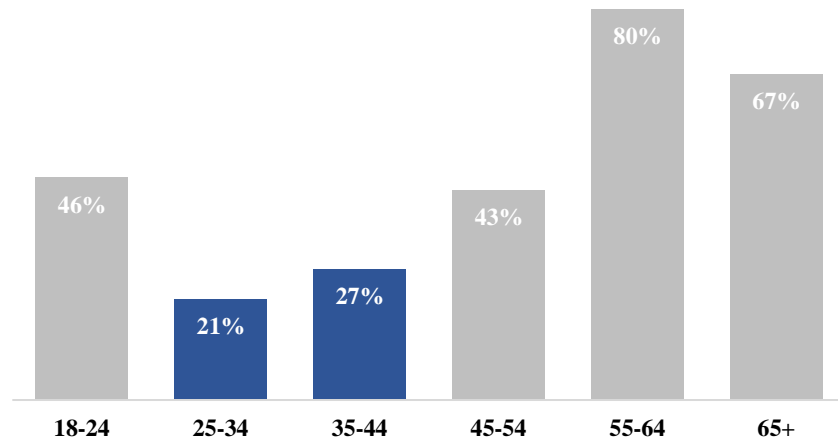
<i>Socializing</i>	Loud	Quiet	Friendly	Intimidating	Isolating	Inclusive
	0	35	12	9	7	9
<i>Learning</i>	Clear	Confusing	Ignorant	Knowledgeable	Interesting	Boring
	5	10	2	29	31	7
<i>Revitalizing</i>	Energizing	Exhausting	Calming	Stressful	Exciting	Low energy
	11	4	28	1	9	14

Table 3
Responses from ‘art museum persons’ demonstrate a similar distribution (n=31)

<i>Socializing</i>	Loud	Quiet	Friendly	Intimidating	Isolating	Inclusive
	5	26	13	9	6	8
<i>Learning</i>	Clear	Confusing	Ignorant	Knowledgeable	Interesting	Boring
	9	8	1	18	27	6
<i>Revitalizing</i>	Energizing	Exhausting	Calming	Stressful	Exciting	Low energy
	13	6	26	1	12	7

Analysis for this question found no significant difference between popular responses from ‘art museum persons’ and ‘non-art museum persons’ of the study. This suggests that nonfrequent visitors that do not identify with or enjoy art museum experiences generally perceive art museums as objectively, if not personally, interesting.

Figure 4.10
Participants between 25-44 years old were least likely to describe art museums as ‘friendly’ (n=80)



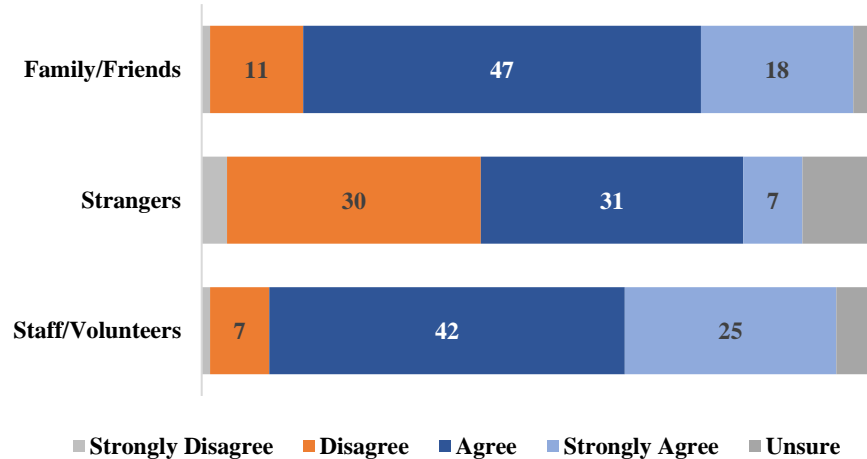
Data analysis by age demographics reveals that participants younger than 25 and older than 45 years old were more likely to describe art museums as friendly. The age ranges with the highest rate of selecting the adjective were participants between 55-64 years old and 65 years and older. Since the number of participants identifying as older than 44 years old are not well represented in the study's sample however, future studies should attempt duplicating this finding. With most participants identifying as between 25-34 years old (n=39) and between 35-44 years old (n=15), only a fifth and a third of each demographic consider art museums friendly, respectively. Compared to nearly half of the 11 participants identifying as 18-24 years old, the difference is striking.

Art Museums as Social, Interpretive, and Rejuvenating

The interview asked nonfrequent visitors to what extent they perceive art museums as generally good places for people to engage in certain activities. Again, the study measured perceptions of activities related to Judy Rand's *Visitors' Bill of Rights*, specifically those of *socialization*, *learning*, and *revitalization* (Rand, 1996).

Three to four activities were selected to represent various aspects of each. In the category of *socialization*, participants shared their perceptions of art museums as good places for socializing with family and friends, strangers, and museum staff and volunteers. Regarding *learning*, participants either disagreed or agreed that art museums are good places for learning more, developing a new interest, building on prior knowledge, and gaining a wider perspective. For the final category of *revitalization*, participants shared their opinions on museums as places for reflection, feeling energized and inspired, and refreshed and relaxed.

Figure 4.11

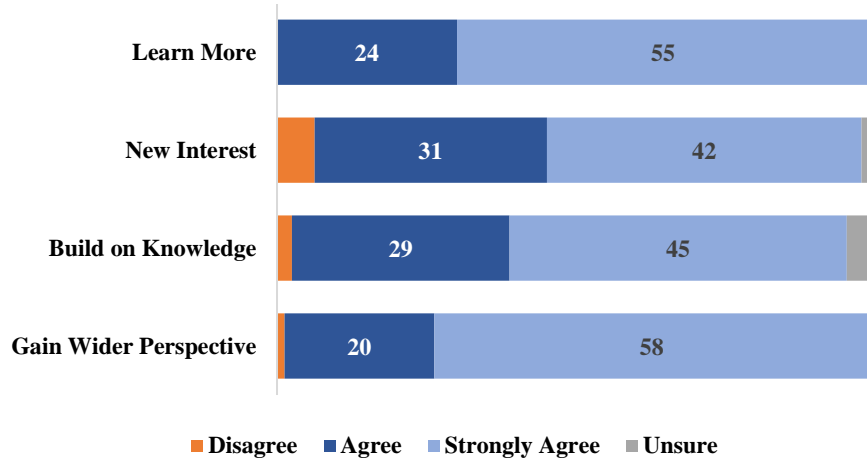
Most participants agree that art museums are good places for socializing (n=80)

When asked how they perceive socializing in art museums, many participants responded that they agreed or strongly agreed in favor of them as places for socializing especially with preexisting social groups and museum representatives. Combining responses that agreed and strongly agreed, 82% (n=65) of participants perceive art museums as good places for socializing with family and friends. 84% (n=67) similarly perceive art museums as good places for interacting with museum staff or volunteers.

While the combined responses yield that nearly half of the participants (48%, n=38) perceive art museums as good places for socializing with strangers, 42% (n=33) believe the opposite and either disagree or disagree strongly. The category of socializing with strangers also cultivated the highest percentage of unsure responses with 9 participants (12%) having struggled to respond to the prompt, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Figure 4.12

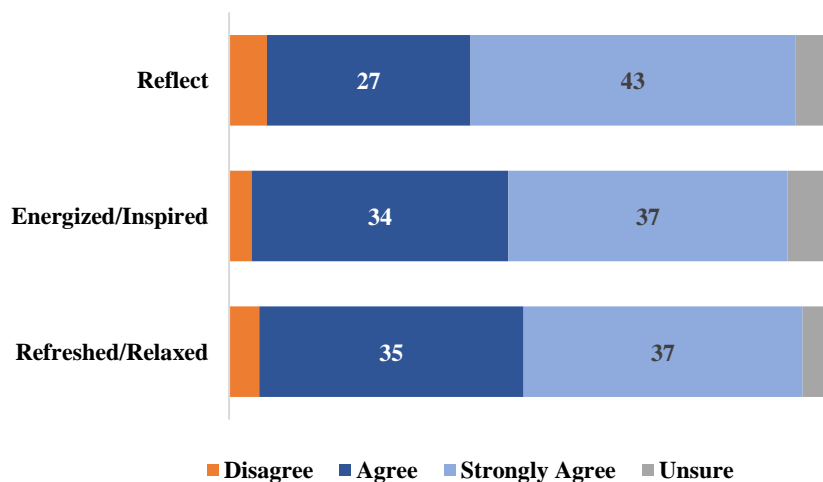
Most participants strongly agree that art museums are good places for learning (n=80)



Between the activity categories, nonfrequent visitor perceptions of art museums as good places for learning yielded the most responses that strongly agreed over agreeing or disagreeing. Moreover, none of the 80 study participants responded by strongly disagreeing for any of the activities in the category. Notably, 73% (n=58) of participants strongly agree that art museums are generally good places for gaining a wider perspective. This finding, along with the 69% (n=55) of participants who perceive art museums as good places for learning more, mark the two most common responses among all three activity categories of *socializing*, *learning*, and *revitalization*.

Figure 4.13

Most participants agree or strongly agree that art museums are revitalizing (n=80)



Following the trends of the previously discussed categories, when asked whether they perceive art museums as good places for activities related to rejuvenation, most participants agreed or strongly agreed. Just as with activities related to learning, none of the study’s 80 participants responded by strongly disagreeing for any of this category’s activities. Combining responses of agree and strongly agree, 88% (n=70) of participants perceive art museums as good places for self-reflection, 89% (n=71) believe they are generally good places to feel energized and inspired, and 90% (n=72) find art museums refreshing and relaxing.

Table 4
‘Non-art museum persons’ moderately agree that art museums are good places for learning (n=43)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
Feel like learning	0%	0%	42%	56%	3%
New Interest	0%	7%	52%	40%	3%
Build on knowledge	0%	5%	42%	45%	10%
Wider Perspective	0%	3%	31%	66%	3%

Table 5
Most ‘art museum persons’ strongly agree that art museums are good places for learning (n=43)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
Feel like learning	0%	0%	17%	84%	0%
New Interest	0%	4%	26%	71%	0%
Build on knowledge	0%	0%	29%	71%	0%
Wider Perspective	0%	0%	17%	84%	0%

Comparing the responses of self-identified ‘non art museum persons’ and ‘art museum persons’ of the study results in little significant difference from general analysis. In the activity categories of socializing and rejuvenation, both ‘non-art museum persons’ and ‘art museum

persons' responded similarly. In the case of perceiving art museums as good places for engaging in learning activities however, 'art museum persons' demonstrated a clear emphasis on strongly agreeing. 'Non-art museum persons' in comparison responded to the prompts with a more even distribution between agreeing and strongly agreeing.

Summarizing how nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums

The findings of this study demonstrate that approximately half of nonfrequent visitors perceive the intended audiences of art museums, understood as 'art museum persons' in this study, as stereotypes like White, wealthy, and educated, and as art-curious with specific interests related to the discipline of art. Moreover, approximately half of participants do not consider themselves 'art museum persons' predominantly due to a lack of enjoyment of art museum experiences. For the fourth of participants who do consider themselves the intended audience of art museums, they predominantly associate visiting art museums with personal development, perceiving visits as opportunities to cultivate casual or professional interests.

Instead of visiting art museums more than once a year, nonfrequent visitors predominantly spend their leisure time on fitness and entertainment-related activities, with the most popular leisure time motivation being wellness benefits. When it comes to visiting art museums, over half of participants associate the experience with feelings of excitement although participants who did not consider themselves 'art museum persons' were more likely to associate visiting art museums with feelings of indifference.

When asked to describe art museums in general, nonfrequent visitors most often selected the adjectives "quiet," "interesting," "calming," and "knowledgeable," regardless of whether or

not they identified as ‘art museum persons’ which suggests that participants objectively perceive art museums as quiet, interesting, calming, and knowledgeable places. Similarly, when asked their opinion of art museums as generally good places for people to participate certain activities, with the exception of socializing with strangers, the majority of participants perceived art museums as good places for activities related to socializing, learning, and revitalization with no discernible difference between the responses of ‘art museum persons’ and ‘non-art museum persons.’

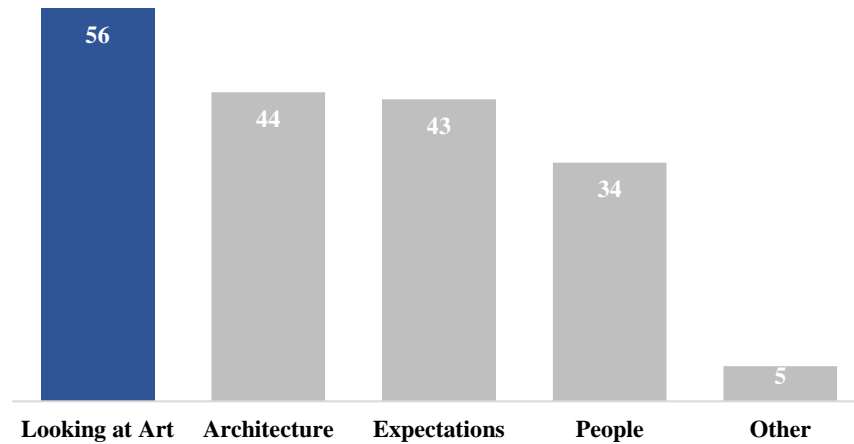
2. To what characteristics of art museums do nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions?

Attributing Perceptions to Characteristics of Art Museums

After participants described art museums using adjectives and according to how strongly they disagree or agree with certain statements, subsequent questions asked what about art museums influenced their decisions. The researcher sometimes prompted participants further to think beyond their personal experiences or preferences with visiting art museums. While participants could formulate their opinions based on previous experiences, the study sought deeper responses that say more than generally referencing a memorable visit as an influence. Rather, participants were asked to consider what about that visit specifically contributed to their perceptions of art museums.

Figure 4.14

Most participants attribute their description of art museums to the act of looking at art (n=80)



70% (n=56) of participants mentioned that looking at art, interacting with artworks, the content or essence of the art itself, or the labels interpreting the art influenced their choice of adjectives to describe art museums. Responses in this category included statements such as “*witnessing others’ talent creates a sense of awe*” and “*learning about the artist’s biography, the historical context.*” 55% (n=44) of nonfrequent visitors mentioned the aspects of art museums related to architecture and space in their responses. Characteristics such as these were “*the lighting,*” “*the layout of the exhibition and spacing of the artwork,*” “*tall ceilings and wide, blank walls,*” and “*the atmosphere.*”

Responses related to expectations of visiting art museums and perceptions of their institutional purpose were the third most common. With 54% (n=43) of participants justifying their answers in this manner, this category consists of stated social norms likening art museums to churches and libraries, as well as personal intentions. Some responses in this category included: “*I consider it taboo to be loud in art museums,*” “*museums are responsible for large groups of people,*” and “*you get to remark on talent and the remarkable qualities of art there.*”

43% (n=34) of participants referenced the people present in art museums as having influenced their choice of adjectives. Responses contributing to this category reflect nonfrequent visitor perceptions of other art museum visitors and staff or volunteers. Examples include “*certain museum workers are snobby against people of color,*” “*the people there are polite and courteous,*” “*docents are knowledgeable,*” and “*curators know their stuff.*” Participants whose answers cannot be otherwise sorted into the other categories made up 7% (n=5) of the sample. These ‘other’ responses mainly focused on issues of accessibility related to high admission costs.

Table 6

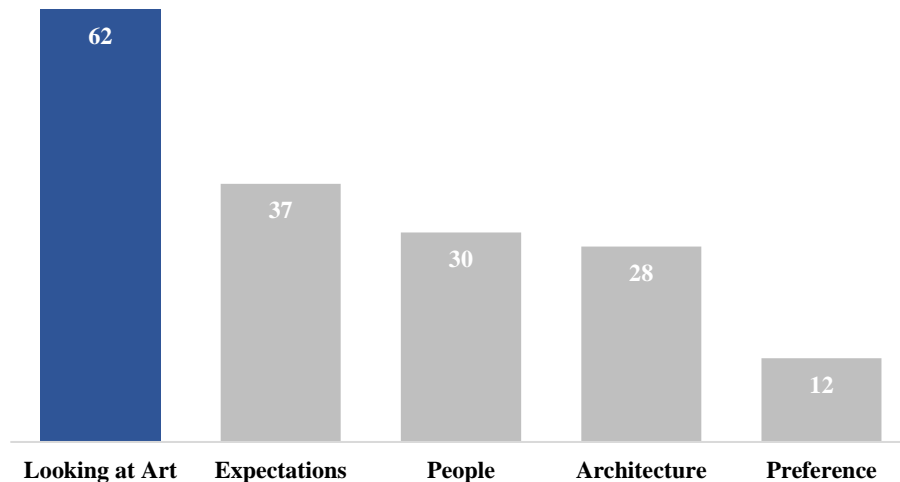
Participants attribute different adjectives to distinct combinations of art museum characteristics (n=80)

		Quiet	Interesting	Calming	Knowledgeable
n=56	Looking at Art	84%	83%	74%	66%
n=44	Architecture	89%	78%	78%	57%
n=43	Expectations	86%	79%	75%	61%
n=34	People	89%	71%	74%	80%

For each of the four categories of art museum characteristics, most respondents selected the adjective ‘quiet’ to describe art museums. For these participants, aspects of architecture and people in art museums were the most commonly referenced influences over their choice of adjective. Participants who described looking at art and their expectations of art museums as the main influences over their perceptions were more likely to select the adjective ‘interesting’ in describing art museums. Furthermore, for participants who described art museums as ‘calming,’ architecture at 78% (n=34) was most commonly mentioned as an influential characteristic. Similarly, of the participants who described art museums as ‘knowledgeable,’ 80% (n=27) attributed their perceptions to the people they associate with visiting or working there.

Figure 4.15

Most participants attribute their perceptions related to socializing, learning, and revitalization to the act of looking at art (n=79)



79% (n=62) of participants referenced aspects of art and its interpretation when asked what influenced whether they thought of art museums as generally good places for socializing, learning, and revitalization activities. According to the comments contributing to this category, the act of viewing art or the discipline of art is “*a subject to start conversations,*” “*has a strong tie to history [which] helps you gain a wider perspective,*” and “*is content that leads to self-reflection.*” Responses in this category shared a strong sentiment that this quote captures:

“That’s the point - being able to focus on the art. Art museums allow that focus and support the experience by creating a big, quiet atmosphere which is peaceful.”

47% (n=37) of participants attributed their opinions of art museums to social norms and behavioral expectations related to visiting. Typical responses in this category are such: “*standing and moving out of each other’s way [to] look at art together is a social experience*” and “*it would be weird to socialize with strangers because it’s so quiet, I don’t want to disturb others.*” 38% (n=30) of participants responded with comments like “*staff and volunteers would know*

anything you'd want to know” and “people discuss art with anyone who's looking at the same piece,” and “people have positive experiences [in art museums] and exude that positivity.”

In contrast to the 55% (n=44) of participants citing architecture for their choice in adjectives, only 35% (n=28) stated that architectural or spatial aspects contributed to their opinions on appropriate art museum activities. Some common responses included: *“square and huge white walls, high ceilings which make for a less welcoming environment,” “the space is just so devoted to the experience and absorption of the art,”* and *“[you] can focus because of uncluttered, open spaces.”* 16% (n=12) of participants elaborated on their opinions by maintaining that personality and individual interests of other museum visitors would either enhance or mitigate how good art museums are as spaces for socializing, learning, and rejuvenation.

Summarizing to what characteristics of art museums nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions

The findings of this study demonstrate that nonfrequent visitors most often attributed their perceptions of art museums as quiet, interesting, calming, and knowledgeable places to the act of looking at art and the activity's related aspects such as the interpretation and labels contextualizing artwork or the content of the art itself. When asked what influenced their descriptions of art museums and opinions on whether art museums are good places for activities related to socializing, learning, and revitalization, the majority of participants also attributed their judgements to this act of looking at art. Overall however, four characteristics of art museums were mentioned in participant responses: looking at art, architecture, expectations or assumptions

about art museum affordances, and people in art museums, either visitors or museum representatives.

Specifically, participants who described art museums as “quiet,” were more likely to attribute their perceptions to the architecture of art museums and the people they associate with being in them. Nonfrequent visitors also attributed their perceptions to architecture more often after describing art museums as “calming” and also more often attributed their perceptions of art museums as “knowledgeable” to the people who may be there. Meanwhile, participants who described art museums as “interesting” were more likely to attribute their perceptions to the act of looking at art and their expectations of art museum affordances.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

As art museums adjust their priorities towards visitor-centric practices, findings from audience research can meaningfully contribute to future institutional strategies. With contemporary audiences facing increasing work-life demands and competing leisure time options, to maintain relevance and encourage visitation, art museums rely on research to understand the motivations driving popular leisure activities and contemporary perceptions of their institutions. Despite a shift in many art museums that emphasizes public-facing services such as education and interpretation, annual visitation is steadily declining – especially among younger age demographics and diverse audiences. Focused on the perceptions of nonfrequent visitors, defined by this study as individuals who have not visited an art museum more than once within the last two years, this study contributes to research on leisure time motivations and perceptions of art museum affordances.

This study investigated contemporary public perceptions of art museums by determining how nonfrequent visitors otherwise spend their leisure time and whether this audience perceives art museums as beneficial places for socializing, learning, and rejuvenation. Specifically, this study explored 1) how nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums and 2) the characteristics to which nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions. Interviews were conducted with 80 adult members of the public who self-reported low visitation frequency within the past two years.

Conclusions

How nonfrequent visitors describe visiting art museums

Nonfrequent visitors described the intended audiences of art museums in terms of stereotypes and did not identify as such. During the interview, 52% of study participants referred to the concept of ‘art museum persons,’ or archetype for the ideal art museum visitor, as privileged. Common descriptions of this privilege referenced having the luxuries of time and disposable income to frequent art museums regularly, suggesting that participants perceived these art museum visitors as possessing higher cultural capital by describing them as older, educated, and cultured (Bourdieu, 1986). For some nonfrequent visitors, these perceptions of class disparities were also associated with racial and ethnic inequities. In these responses, if participants distinguished ‘art museum persons’ by race or ethnicity at all, they perceived them as White or Caucasian and not as people of color.

As the development of American art museums is imbued with the tastes and norms of the wealthy, upper class, the perceptions of this study’s participants can be attributed historical truth (Cameron, 1971; Dana, 1917; Low, 1942, Weil, 2002). The predominant use of privilege-related stereotypes as descriptors of art museum visitors however, supports other studies that suggest the public maintains prevailing negative connotations with art museums (Dana, 1917; Conn, 2010; Fisher, 2018). Additionally, research supports these perceptions as Western museums predominantly attract visitors who identify as older, White, affluent, and well-educated without cultivating younger, more demographically diverse audiences (Black, 2011; Falk, 2016).

Furthermore, by declining to self-identify as ‘art museum persons,’ most study participants intentionally distanced themselves from those whom they perceive would signal an

accumulation of experiences and prestige associated with acting as an art museum visitor (Bourdieu, 1986). Although most study participants visited an art museum at least once in the past two years and expressed liking art, this purposeful choice highlights a difference between public perceptions that equate visiting art museums with demonstrations of privilege instead of interest and enjoyment of art.

The pursuit of personal wellness motivates nonfrequent visitors when engaging in leisure time activities. When asked how they typically spend their time outside of work, most participants responded with activities related to fitness and entertainment. Fitness activities include a spectrum ranging from casual exercise, such as taking walks, to rigorous workouts involving martial arts training. Instead of visiting art museums, nonfrequent visitors also mentioned prioritizing socializing, relocating to different scenes separate from their routines, and being creative and learning.

Most participants attributed their use of leisure time to the pursuit of physical and mental wellness. Nonfrequent visitors expressed feeling justified in their choices because they perceived them as objectively healthy, mood-enhancing, and important as stress relievers. Along with the remaining leisure time motivations being “personal development,” “social interaction,” and “fun,” participants’ leisure time needs resemble the four visitor needs of *revitalization*, *learning*, *socializing*, and *fun* (Rand, 1996). Although nonfrequent visitors may not seek museum experiences to meet their leisure needs relatively often, they remain motivated by the same visitor needs that art museums are equipped to support such as designated spaces for restorative experiences involving creativity and reflection (Black, 2011; Falk, 2016; Skydsgaard et al., 2016). Furthermore, art museums are moving towards educating visitors with more interpretive

content surrounding artworks, appealing to public interests (Korn, 2007; Mayer, 1998; Weil, 2002).

Nonfrequent visitors generally associate art museums with positive perceptions.

Although nonfrequent visitors expressed a spectrum of emotional responses, 58% of participants were excited over the prospect of visiting art museums. Some participants also anticipated feeling either curious or indifferent. Approximately a fifth of participants felt some degree of cautiousness, expressing anxiety over lacking familiarity with art museum offerings and behavioral expectations. As nonfrequent visitors experience visits less often and are less likely to self-identify as the intended audience of art museums, they might claim lower cultural capital in this regard (Bourdieu, 1986). In comparison, a more frequent visitor or self-identified ‘art museum person’ may feel more confident navigating art museums having witnessed and practiced modeled behaviors over more time (Bourdieu, 1986; Leahy, 2012).

When asked what prompted these emotions, most participants predicted an opportunity to experience novelty apart from mundane routine. Additionally, nearly a third of participants expected learning experiences related to personal or art-related interests. Other nonfrequent visitors admitted being ignorant of current exhibitions on display or a slight preference for alternative leisure activities. While these participants made up no more than 20% of the study’s sample, their attitudes indicate a distinct departure from the clear, positive expectations of the majority. The majority of participants expressed certainty over the affordances of a visit to an art museum and therefore easily determined whether these affordances align well with their needs (Falk, 2016). In comparison, the others’ responses can be understood as perceived misalignment between self-related motivations and art museum affordances. As the field-wide shift from traditional didactic strategies to visitor-centric engagement is ongoing, the public’s shared

understanding of art museums is likewise underdeveloped and seemingly disjointed (Black, 2011; Falk, 2016; Mason & McCarthy, 2006).

Nonfrequent visitors specifically perceive art museums as quiet, interesting, calming, and knowledgeable. In comparison, the least commonly used adjectives that participants used to describe art museums were “loud” (7%), “ignorant” (4%), and “stressful” (3%), words that can be understood as directly opposite in meaning as the popularly selected adjectives of “quiet”(84%), “interesting” (79%), “calming” (75%), and “knowledgeable” (65%). As the study offered participants the option between adjectives that related to Judy Rand’s *Visitors’ Bill of Rights*, the adjective “quiet” pertains to the visitor need for *socialization*, the adjectives “interesting” and “knowledgeable” pertain to the need for *learning*, and “calming” pertains to the need for *revitalization* (Rand, 1996). Moreover, the adjectives “interesting,” “knowledgeable,” and “calming” all have positive connotations in relation to the visitor needs of *learning* and *revitalization* which suggests that nonfrequent visitors perceive art museums positively in regard to these visitor needs.

When asked explicitly, nonfrequent visitors generally considered art museums as suitable places for activities related to *socializing*, *learning*, and *revitalization* – some to a greater extent than others (Rand, 1996). Most participants agreed or strongly agreed that art museums are good places for socializing within preexisting social groups and interacting with staff or volunteers. In contrast, nonfrequent visitors were almost equally split over whether they were appropriate spaces for socializing with strangers. For all activities related to *learning* and *revitalization*, participants also overwhelmingly deemed art museums beneficial spaces.

These findings illustrate that the perceptions of nonfrequent visitors emphasize treating art museums as spaces for personal development, sharing experiences with family and friends,

and wellness. In terms of personal development, visitors learn new concepts and build on knowledge by engaging with interpretive content and museum floor staff (Doering, 1999; Kelly, 2007; Holliday et al., 2014). Visitors are also known to arrive at museums together and then alternate between operating alone and as group units, motivated by personal, self-related motivations and social, group identities (Falk, 2016; Kuflik et al., 2001). Additionally, participants of this study strongly associate art museums with introspection and time to be present with artwork. These findings especially reinforce the museum identity known as *rechargers* who seek spiritual or restorative experiences (Falk, 2016).

The characteristics to which nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions

Nonfrequent visitors attribute their perceptions to the discipline of art. When asked what influenced their descriptions of art museums, 70% of participants emphasized respecting the artworks and artists represented as well as the normalized behaviors associated with appreciating and learning about art. Analysis of participant attributions by the most popularly selected adjectives found that the participants who described art museums as “quiet” were more likely to attribute their perception to architectural features and the people that may be there. The adjective “interesting” was more often used by participants who attributed their perceptions to the discipline of art and personal expectations of the museum’s purpose. Participants who described art museums as “calming” were more likely to attribute their perceptions to architectural features whereas the adjective “knowledgeable” was used more often by participants who attributed their perceptions to the people visiting or working at art museums.

When asked what influenced their perceptions of art museums as good places for socializing, learning, and revitalization, 79% of participants attributed their judgements to aspects of art as a discipline and the interpretation of art in museums. Throughout the interviews, it grew apparent that participants believed that pursuing art-related experiences is the main objective associated with visiting art museums. With this perspective, participants predominantly measured the alignment of the different socializing, learning, and revitalization activities against this main objective. Participants also discussed the factors that contributed to their perceptions as existing simultaneously and accumulating into an environment devoted to experiencing art, supporting observations about atmospheric elements in which they are shown to influence visitors in conjunction (Regan, 2014).

As nearly half of the participants attributed their perceptions to expectations of behavioral norms and etiquette, this study demonstrates how perceptions of art museums as elitist and exclusive prevail among contemporary museum audiences (Dana, 1917; Conn, 2010). 35% of participants also attributed this sense of formality to the stereotypical, modern aesthetic of art museums: white walls and tall ceilings that “make for a less welcoming environment.” Within the same category of responses however, participants credited the architecture of art museums as providing uncluttered spaces that support learning and revitalization activities.

Implications

This study adds to the discourse surrounding museums and assessing institutional relevance with the public. The conclusions above have implications for practice and future research.

Considerations for Practice

Art museums can alleviate the anxieties of nonfrequent visitors by communicating clear behavioral expectations. When asked about their perceptions of art museums, participants attributed feelings of unease and uncertainty to lacking knowledge. As nonfrequent visitors, the study's sample represents a population that does not visit art museums regularly or at all. Participants expressed varying degrees of familiarity with art museum experiences, with some voicing feelings of inadequacy when it came to knowledge about upcoming exhibitions, how to dress or behave appropriately, or whether their children would be welcome. Communicating with the public what activities and norms art museums expect of them would prepare both frequent and nonfrequent visitors to engage with museum content as intended, cultivating trust and comfort.

Art museums can consider drafting a list of encouraged behaviors and explicit messages of welcome for their intended audiences. Curatorial and programming departments can collaborate with museum leadership to discuss these museum norms and inclusive messaging. For example, meetings could decide on policies regarding general, institution-wide norms and frequent visitors. In contrast, for nonfrequent visitors and exhibition or event-specific target audiences, art museums should consider drafting separate lists of museum norms to set clearly distinct ways of engaging with their content that may be temporary or not extend throughout the museum.

If art museums consider this strategy, they should discuss visible and effective locations to display all encouraged behaviors and messages of welcoming, permanent or temporary. For example, art museums can display general museum norms and differing expectations for temporary exhibits and programs at their entrances. Institutions can also train visitor service

representatives and security staff in sharing and encouraging these norms with visitors as they arrive and traverse museum spaces. Curatorial teams can also be creative in implementing reminders of exhibition or program norms within galleries. By clearly communicating and reiterating behavioral expectations and the characteristics of intended audiences, art museums can relieve their visitors of ignorance and fearing judgement. Moreover, art museum can more easily attract nonfrequent visitors whose preferred leisure activities accommodate behavioral or social norms not typically associated with art museums, such as open conversation or physical interactives.

Art museums can attract nonfrequent visitors by advertising free opportunities and framing exhibitions as personally relevant. Participants in this study agreed that art museums are suitable places for pursuing wellness and personal development, the two most popular leisure motivations of nonfrequent visitors, through revitalization and learning activities. More than half of the study's participants did not identify as "art museum persons" or the intended audience of art museums, citing disinterest or a lack of enjoyment and barriers to participation such as unaffordable admission prices and limited leisure time. Apart from associating art museums with disinterest and a lack of enjoyment, participants who did identify as "art museum persons" also stressed the same barriers to participation – namely money, time, and transportation issues.

Art museums can consider amplifying promotional information related to their free admission policies for exhibitions and programming. Communications departments in art museums need to combat nonfrequent visitors' lack of knowledge and limited leisure time by acknowledging their busy schedules and sharing specific dates when they can expect free museum admission. Marketing efforts can also customize to suit nonfrequent visitor leisure needs by appealing to their desire for relaxation or development of personal interests.

Advertisement campaigns on social media and along popular transportation routes can specifically target different types of nonfrequent visitors based on social group needs by instituting and promoting “family or friends days,” interest-based needs by highlighting connections between art and other disciplines, and social hours for art-loving strangers to meet and discuss without fear of disrupting others’ experiences of looking at art.

Art museums can partner with community spaces and bring their content to nonfrequent visitors. Although participants in the study had not been to an art museum more than once in the last two years, at the time of the study they spent leisure time in community spaces such as coffeeshops and libraries and described traveling and venturing into nature. Art museums can consider increasing access to their collections and programming by asking coffeeshops and libraries to host temporary exhibitions or events. These pop-up extensions of art museums could be an effective method of attracting and interacting with nontraditional audiences. By moving exhibition content outside of art museum spaces, art museums can take advantage of the differing perceptions the public attributes to other community centers. For example, nonfrequent visitors in a coffeeshop may feel more comfortable admiring and discussing artwork and labels in an environment they are accustomed to behave casually and socially.

If art museums consider employing this strategy, additional information should bridge connections between temporary pop-ups and current or upcoming museum offerings. Additional information might emphasize similarities between the pop-ups and museum services by highlighting related content, interactivity, or casual atmosphere. By establishing connections such as these, art museums can engage with nonfrequent visitors in places where they already experience comfort and familiarity. Furthermore, nonfrequent visitors who have positive

experiences with art museum content in this manner may be more likely to perceive art museums as places of comfort and choose to build familiarity with them as community centers, also.

Considerations for Further Research

What connotations do nonfrequent visitors attribute to their perceptions of art museums? Due to the small sample size of this study, researchers should reiterate the methodology of this descriptive survey and attempt to duplicate or add nuance to findings. In doing this, researchers should also consider examining more closely the perceptions that nonfrequent visitors associate with visiting art museums. For example, this study did not capture whether participants thought that their perceptions of art museums were positive or negative. Anecdotally, although most respondents described art museums as “quiet,” some briefly mentioned that they perceived the adjective as a positive characteristic of the museum – “but in a good way” while others described the same perception in negative terms, such as “restrictive.”

Further research could explore whether nonfrequent visitors associate their perceptions of art museums with positive, negative, or mixed connotations. Using the methodology and results of this study as a foundation, a new study could illuminate the field’s understanding of audience perceptions beyond superficial descriptions. By gathering details such as these about nonfrequent visitor perceptions, research can investigate what perceived characteristics of art museums are considered beneficial or detrimental to their relationship with this public audience. Based on these future findings, curatorial, education, and development departments in art museums can consider strengthening messaging that supports perceptions of positive characteristics and similarly, create content that negates associations with negative characteristics.

What motivates nonfrequent visitors to visit art museums? In capturing their general perceptions of art museums, this study did not directly ask participants about their motivations behind visiting or what they anticipate would motivate a future visit. While screening for study eligibility, a process that ensured participants were nonfrequent visitors whose art museum attendance was no more than one visit annually for the last two years, 48 individuals were approached and deemed to be frequent visitors. Although interview data was not collected from frequent visitors, conversations with these individuals established their perception of art museums as personally relevant and financially accessible. Anecdotally, frequent visitors attributed their high art museum attendance to free admission and accessibility via walking or public transportation. This anecdotal evidence suggests that frequent visitors do not perceive the same barriers to participation as nonfrequent visitors, instead crediting their opposite for encouraging high visitation.

Research is needed to determine whether patterns exist between perceived accessibility and increased motivation to visit among nonfrequent visitors, or in other words: the potential differences between frequent and nonfrequent visitors. Further research could also determine nonfrequent visitor perceptions of and receptivity to potential marketing and interpretive strategies employed by art museums. Using this research as a foundation, a new study could explore what nonfrequent visitors perceive as highly motivating and effective marketing of art museum experiences for themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Nonfrequent Visitor Interview Instrument: Facilitated Questionnaire

Data Site: _____

Date: _____

Context: Hello, my name is Nicole. I am a graduate student at the University of Washington. I’m here today to learn about what and how people think about art museums. Do you have 5 - 10 minutes to answer some questions? Your participation would be completely voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential.

Screeners: If participant has not visited an art museum frequently in the last 2 years, continue.

Have you visited an art museum in the last two years? yes no

How often have you visited in the last two years? Once in 2 years Once each year

1. What types of activities typically take up your personal, free time?
For what reasons do you engage in those activities?

2. What does the term “art museum person” mean to you and would you consider yourself one?
Why or why not? [RQ1]

3. If you had to describe the personality of art museums, what adjectives from this list would you use? There’s no number limit and feel free to mention adjectives not on this list. [RQ1]

Loud	Quiet	Friendly	Intimidating	Isolating	Inclusive
Clear	Confusing	Ignorant	Knowledgeable	Interesting	Boring
Energizing	Exhausting	Calming	Stressful	Exciting	Low energy

Other:

4. Could you tell me what about art museums made you pick those adjectives? [RQ2]
Is it something about the architecture/space, the people, the exhibits/content?

5. When you think about going to an art museum, what feelings are the first to come up? [RQ1]
Could you explain why? [RQ2]

6. How strongly do you agree or disagree that art museums are good places for people to do the following? [RQ1]

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
Socialize with family/friends					
Socialize with strangers					
Interact with staff/volunteers					
Feel like learning more					
Develop a new interest					
Build on prior knowledge					
Gain a wider perspective					
Self-reflect					
Feel energized and inspired					
Feel refreshed and peaceful					

7. I noticed that most of your responses strongly _____ that art museums are good places for (socializing, learning, and/or re-energizing,” could you explain what about art museums influenced your opinions? [RQ2]

PART 2: Demographics

Please fill in only what you're comfortable answering.

What is your zip code or country?

What gender(s), if any, do you identify with?

What race(s) or ethnicities, if any, do you identify with?

What is your age range?

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B – Nonfrequent Visitor Interview Instrument: Descriptive Tool

If you had to describe the personality of art museums, what adjectives would you use?

Loud	Quiet	Friendly	Intimidating	Isolating	Inclusive
Clear	Confusing	Ignorant	Knowledgeable	Interesting	Boring
Energizing	Exhausting	Calming	Stressful	Exciting	Low energy

Appendix C – Nonfrequent Visitor Interview Instrument: Intensity Tool

How strongly do you agree or disagree that art museums are good places for people to do the following?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
Socialize with family/friends					
Socialize with strangers					
Interact with museum staff/volunteers					
Feel like learning more					
Develop a new interest					
Build on prior knowledge					
Gain a wider perspective					
Self-reflect					
Feel energized and inspired					
Feel refreshed and at peace					

Appendix D – Nonfrequent Visitor Interview Instrument: Coding Rubric

Marie Nicole Inco Claudio | 2019

CODING RUBRIC

Screener: Have you visited an art museum in the last two years?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Yes	Participants verbally responded "yes."	
2	No	Participants verbally responded "no."	

Screener: How often have you visited in the last two years?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Once in two years	Participants verbally responded that they have visited art museums only once in the last two years.	
2	Once each year	Participants verbally responded that they have visited art museums once each year in the last two years.	

Q1A: What types of activities typically take up your personal, free time?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Fitness	Participants describe spending leisure time on activities related to physical health.	"run"; "exercise"; "go hiking"; "go on walks"
2	Social	Participants describe spending leisure time on activities related to interactions with other people.	"hang out with friends"; "spend time with kids"
3	Entertainment	Participants describe spending leisure time on activities they consider to be fun or enjoyable.	"go to museums"; "watch TV"; "go to live concerts"; "read"
4	Difference Scene	Participants describe spending leisure time in places besides their homes or workplaces.	"go to a bar"; "eat out at a restaurant"; "be in nature"
5	Creative/Learning	Participants describe studying personal interests, participating in creative activities, or working on personal projects.	"work on personal projects"; "play music"; "write"
6	Other	Truly odd responses that cannot be categorized in the previous codes.	"chill at home"; "job search"; "work on the house"; "cooking"; "job-related work"

Q1B: For what reasons do you engage in those activities?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Wellness	Participants describe motivations related to physical, mental, or emotional health benefits.	"get in shape"; "mainly for health"; "relax"; "stress-reducing"; "escape from life"; "get away from work"
2	Social Interaction	Participants describe motivations related to the benefits of spending time with other people.	"daughter loves art"; "social with people my age"; "social interaction"
3	Fun	Participants describe motivations related to a sense of fun or personal enjoyment.	"fun"; "entertainment"; "enjoys"
4	Personal Development	Participants describe motivations related to self-improvement or developing personal interests.	"intellectual stimulation"; "loves to learn"; "self-reflection"; "seeking inspiration"
5	Convenience	Participants describe motivations related to ease of access.	"easy to do"; "convenient"; "free"

Q2A: What does the term "art museum person" mean to you?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Can be anyone	Responses specifically used the word "anyone" or referenced the general applicability of the term.	"anybody"; "could be a lot of different people"; "everyone likes art for different reasons"
2	Generally Curious	Responses described individuals who are interested in novelty and are open to new experiences.	"someone who likes learning new things"; "someone curious"; "openminded"
3	Curious about art	Responses described a spectrum of interest and knowledge in the discipline of art ranging from having artistic talent or specific art-related interests to having some form of art education.	"fairly intellectual/academic"; "studied art"; "interested in art history"; "has background knowledge about artists"; "interested in what's there"
4	Hobbyist/Professional	Responses described a spectrum of art-related skills ranging from having artistic talents or being creative to being an art hobbyist or professional.	"artists themselves"; "creative"; "someone who gets inspiration from going"
5	Stereotypes	Responses described assumptions such as racial/ethnic identities, socio-economic status, or level of education.	"someone who goes if they have the time"; "wealthy"; "White"; "cultured"

Q2B: Would you consider yourself an "art museum person?"

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Yes	Participants verbally responded "yes."	
2	No	Participants verbally responded "no."	

Q2C: Why or why not do you consider yourself an "art museum person?"

	Code	Description	Examples
1A.	YES – Social Connection	Respondents describe personal relationships with others in their lives that influenced their identity as an 'art museum person.'	"Father is a fine and graphic artist"; "I have people that are close to me that are into art and I like supporting them"
1B.	YES – Enjoyment	Respondents describe enjoying art museum experiences or express a desire to visit art museums.	"I enjoy going"; "I'm interested in visiting"; "Wish I could go more often"
1C.	YES – Personal Development	Respondents describe personal interests related to art.	"I'm interested in going as a way to keep in touch with culture"; "I appreciate art"; "I've studied art"
1D.	YES – If Convenient	Respondents express a desire to visit art museums that is contingent on ease of access and availability of resources such as time or money.	"I would go if I had the time"
2A.	NO – Circumstantial Participation	Respondents describe visiting art museums only in association with others feeling motivated to go rather than a personal interest in art museum experiences.	"Will only go occasionally if others in my social group are interested"; "I kind of only go because of my friends"
2B.	NO – Does not enjoy	Respondents explicitly express a lack of enjoyment or interest in art museum experiences.	"I don't like what's there"; "Not artistic, can't super relate with art"; "doesn't find art super interesting"
2C.	NO – Despite interest	Respondents who do not consider themselves 'art museum persons' who also express enjoyment or interest in art museum experiences or content.	"I love art"; "I appreciate art"; "I appreciate artistic talent"
2D.	NO – Barriers to participation	Respondents describe lack of access to art museum experiences due to barriers such as admission costs and limited leisure time.	"I'm not wealthy enough to go"; "I don't have the time or money to go that much"

Q3: If you had to describe the personality of art museums, what adjectives from this list would you use?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Loud	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
2	Quiet	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
3	Friendly	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
4	Intimidating	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
5	Isolating	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
6	Inclusive	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
7	Clear	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
8	Confusing	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
9	Ignorant	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	

10	Knowledgeable	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
11	Interesting	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
12	Boring	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
13	Energizing	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
14	Exhausting	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
15	Calming	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
16	Stressful	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
17	Exciting	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
18	Low energy	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
19	Other	Participants verbally mentioned another adjective missing from the available options.	

Q4: Could you tell me what about art museums made you pick those adjectives?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Architecture/Space	Respondents attribute their choice in adjectives to aspects related to the architecture or spaces associated with art museums.	"the environment"; "the lighting"; "the spacing of the artwork"; "the layout"; "the atmosphere"; "the mood"
2	People	Respondents attribute their choice in adjectives to the visitors or museum representatives they perceive as populating art museums.	"classy people"; "curators know their stuff"
3	Looking at art	Respondents attribute their choice in adjectives to aspects related to the discipline or act of looking at art such as the content of artworks themselves or interpretive elements and labels.	"the content of the art"; "witnessing others' talent creates a sense of awe"; "learning about the artist's biography, historical context"
4	Expectations	Respondents attribute their choice in adjectives to their perception of the purpose of art museums or their expectations of art museum affordances.	"Art museums are quiet like a library or church and there are the same behavioral expectations"; "people are polite and respectful there"
5	Other	Truly odd responses that cannot be categorized into the previous codes.	"barriers to inclusion like charging admission"

Q5A: When you think about going to an art museum, what feelings are the first to come up for you?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	General curiosity	Respondents described feelings related to non-specific interests in art museum experiences and content.	"curious"; "interested"; "open to the experience"
2	Excitement	Respondents described feelings of anticipation and enthusiasm at the prospect of visiting art museums.	"excited"; "anticipation"; looking forward"; "prepares self"

3	Indifference	Respondents described feeling neutral, neither positively or negatively at the prospect of visiting art museums.	"not very emotional"; "ambivalent"
4	Cautiousness	Respondents described feelings related to worry or confusion at the prospect of visiting art museums.	"apprehension"; "anxiety"; "what exhibits will be there?"; "what do you wear?"
5	Other	Truly odd responses that cannot be categorized within the previous codes.	"touristy"; "have to slow down"; "superior"; "calm"; "nostalgia"

Q5B: Could you explain why?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Social Group	Respondents attributed their feelings associated with visiting art museums to the influence of others in their social or visiting groups.	"Excited to go to the city and be with friends"; "would be someone else's idea to go"
2	General Curiosity	Respondents attributed their feelings associated with visiting art museums to the interest in seeing or experiencing novelty.	"Expects to see something new/different"; "have never been, would be a nice experiment"
3	Curious about art	Respondents attributed their feelings associated with visiting art museums to specific interests related to art museum content or experiences.	"going to see a certain exhibit"; "wants something easy to just go and get out"; "wants to see something that's of personal interest"
4	Lack of knowledge	Respondents attributed their feelings associated with visiting art museums to confusion or unawareness of art museum content or affordances.	"Will this be a fun couple of hours or boring?"; "Unsure if I'll 'get it'"
5	Low priority	Respondents attributed their feelings associated with visiting art museums to having stronger preferences towards other leisure time activities.	"I've got other things I'd rather do"
6	Other	Truly odd responses that cannot be categorized into the previous codes.	"self-conscious that others will judge"; "associates with traveling"; "depends"; "there's a pressure to appreciate"

Q6: How strongly do you agree or disagree that art museums are good places for people to do the following?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Strongly Disagree	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
2	Disagree	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
3	Agree	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
4	Strongly Agree	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	
5	Unsure	Participants indicated this answer by marking the corresponding box.	

Q7: Could you explain what about art museums influenced your opinions?

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Architecture/Space	Respondents attribute their perceptions to aspects related to the architecture and spaces associated with art museums.	"nice, open spaces"; "warm lighting"; "white walls"; "calming environment"
2	People	Respondents attribute their perceptions to the visitors or museum representatives they associate with populating art museums.	"the kinds of people there"; "when staff are approachable, it's great"; "people discuss art with anyone who's looking at the same piece"
3	Looking at art	Respondents attribute their perceptions to aspects of the discipline or act of looking at art such as the content of artwork or interpretive elements.	"art drives this introspection"; "seeing the art works in person"; "there's a lot to learn"; "can learn from the context of the art and interpretation"
4	Expectations	Respondents attribute their perceptions to their understanding of art museum affordances and social norms.	"not appropriate to socialize since you might disrupt others' experience"; "art museums are like libraries"; "art museums are devoted to the experience and absorption of the art"; "not a place for socializing, a place for learning and reflection"; "the quiet helps you focus and reflect"
5	Preference	Respondents attribute their perceptions to personal characteristics such as personality or individual interests.	"I feel wary sharing my opinions with others"; "mostly introverted, so not sure how other people feel about socializing"; "some art is more interesting than others"

Demographics

	Code	Description	Examples
1	Zipcode/Country	Participants indicated their zipcode or country	
2	Gender Identity	Participants indicated their gender identity by writing a response	
2.1	Male	Participants indicated that they identified as male	
2.2	Female	Participants indicated that they identified as female	
2.3	Other	Participants indicated that they identified as non-binary, gender-fluid, gender-queer, etc.	
3	Races/Ethnicities	Participants indicated their racial/ethnic identities by writing a response	
4	Age Range	Participants indicated their age range by marking the appropriate box	