

Resonance and Relevance:

Reactions to Collaboratively Developed Display of Culture

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Abstract

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As a field-wide effort to ameliorate criticism from post-modern anthropology and enlightened insights stemming from the “crisis of representation literature” (White, 2012), museums sought to incorporate multi-vocality in curatorial authority by employing collaborative models to exhibition development. As collaboration with cultural community members has become increasingly utilized in museums to present ethnographic content, there is significant case-study literature presenting accounts of the processes of collaboration, but there is little investigation into the final product: the exhibition. *Pacific Voices: Celebrating the Worlds Within our Community*, a collaborative exhibition on display at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, WA was used as a case study context to explore community self-representation in long-term ethnographic museum exhibitions. Methods included individual interviews with student members of registered student organizations that self-identify with cultures represented within the exhibit. Study participants indicated a generally positive reaction to the exhibit itself, but

placed less personal value on the display of culture in museums in general. The majority of study participants valued the advocacy and education efforts of their student organizations over the efforts to represent culture in the museum. Future research into collaborative exhibitions and their reception could further explore the efficacy of the collaborative model in fulfilling the needs of the community and the museum.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem Statement

Within the last few decades, new social pressures on museums have garnered a need for change in institutional structures and strategies. Among other newly established practices is the increase in consultation and collaboration with community groups to develop programming and exhibitions. Furthermore, the museum field has arrived at a point where its institutions are regarded as sites of practical anthropology, often striving to present cultures other than our own. Since the rise of postmodern anthropology, museums have begun to look at interdepartmental practices differently. Many institutions are incorporating cultural consultation into aspects of their overall functioning. Development of interpretation and exhibit content, once reserved for academically trained curators, now often involve members of the represented communities. Collections care and management now rely not only on field-wide standard best practices for preservation of materials, but include culturally sensitive practices. Cultural competency in museums is at an all time high, and in many respects, is a result of the impact of academic anthropology.

Many curators and exhibit designers have written about their own experiences delving into the world of collaborative exhibit development models, and often focus on the process, leaving discussion of the implications of the product, the exhibit itself, unaddressed. Some speculate that this is because all too often, this process goes awry, and not all participants are satisfied with the end result (Ames 1994, 1999; Conaty 2003; Kahn 2000b; Lonetree 2012; Lynch 2014; McMullen 2008) Additionally, many practitioners discuss the positive impact and insight gained through the process itself (Simpson 2001; Ames 1994, 1999, Conaty 2003; Kahn 2000b; Lonetree 2012). The goal of this study is to describe and explore the reception of one such final product, a collaborative exhibit, among

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members of the communities consulted, that were not involved in the exhibit development process themselves.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to investigate community self-representation in long-term ethnographic museum exhibitions. To accomplish this, the research focuses on *Pacific Voices: Celebrating the Worlds Within our Community*, a collaborative exhibition on display at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Washington as a case study example.¹

Research Goals:

This research explores the ways in which curatorial messages and cultural content of this collaborative exhibit are relevant to current visitors who self-identify with the cultures represented. The purpose of this research is to investigate community self-representation in long-term ethnographic museum exhibitions. To accomplish this, the research is focused on *Pacific Voices*, a collaborative exhibition on display at the Burke Museum as a case study example. The goal of this research is to identify the extent to which, and the ways in which, collaboratively designed exhibitions maintain relevance with represented cultural groups throughout their course of public display.

¹ The purpose of this research is not to evaluate or challenge the collaborative process involved in curating *Pacific Voices*. Rather, the goal is to investigate the current status of the exhibit among present-day members of the represented cultural communities, and explore constructions of cultural identity among these individuals, as they pertain to exhibition of culture in the museum setting.

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The research questions touch on broad conceptions of cultural identity and representation in museums, as well as targeted questions surrounding the *Pacific Voices* exhibition itself.

Research Questions:

- 1) How does community representation of cultural identity in the museum setting **resonate** with individual manifestation of cultural identity?
- 2) To what extent can long-term ethnographic exhibits maintain **relevance** over time with visitors who are a part of the cultural groups being represented within the exhibit?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Cultural Representation in Museums as Applied Anthropology

“Anthropologists, historically, have had a special affinity with museums, Anthropology’s emphasis on the observation/recording and preservation of the customs, traditions, and artifacts of human populations has caused practicing anthropologists to be concerned, concomitantly, with the reliability of public displays of their research and findings.” (David Julian Hodges, 1978: 154)

When David Julian Hodges wrote his article, *Museums, Anthropology, and Minorities: In Search of a New Relevance for Old Artifacts* in 1978, the museum field was on the brink of a significant paradigm shift. Over the last nearly four decades, museums have shifted their institutional focus towards social relevance, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. This shift has been attributed to various social and political pressures, including but not limited to shifts in institutional funding (Lynch 2014; McMullen 2008; Weil 1997), the rise in assertiveness of indigenous and sovereign communities in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the civil rights movement (Ames 1990, 1992, 1994; Biolsi & Zimmerman 1997; Gorbey 1991; Janes & Conaty 2005; Lurie 1976; Mahuika 1991) as well as critiques from the field of post-modern, reflexive Anthropology (Kahn 2000; Marstine 2011; McMullen 2008; Hodges 1978; Krouse 2006; White, 2012). This literature review begins with an investigation into the impacts Anthropology has had on Museology.

As Anthropology is the study of culture, Museology is the methodology through which the dissemination of these studies occurs. Anthropological theories have long been applied to museological practice, especially in regard to ethnographic content and interpretation. These can be seen as inextricably linked. Applied Anthropology refers to the application of anthropological theory to practical situations. In her article, *Applying Anthropology: Another View of Museum Exhibit Development* (2000), Miriam Kahn directly

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links the emergence of collaborative exhibit development to the critiques from academic anthropology;

“The dialectical relationship between anthropological theory and museum practice has a long history.... the heated dialogues between postmodern, reflexive theorists, on the one hand, and museum employees with practical interests in appealing to diverse audiences and in staying financially afloat, on the other, lie at the core of these [collaborative] exhibits. Recent innovative exhibits, like the Pacific Island exhibits at the Field Museum or the “Pacific Voices” exhibit at the Burke Museum, do not spring from intellectual voids, but are consciously molded by anthropological theory of the 1980s and 1990s.” (Kahn, 2000: 92).

Kahn reminds us of the inherent gap between theory and practice, especially as it pertains to representation of culture. “... no matter how well informed by theory, how noble one’s intentions, how collaborative and inclusive the process, or how many perspectives are presented, the pervasive problem of representing dynamic peoples and ideas in confined static space is difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. And the gap between academic theorizing and popular education, no matter how lessened, is never erased.”

(Kahn, 2000: 94) Anthony Alan Shelton expands on the complexities of this dialectical relationship, articulating that

“it is argued that the expanded space of interpretation, the conflation of the subject and object, the appreciation of the fugitive nature of meaning, and the expanded field of contestation, brought about by increasing globalization and urban multi-ethnicity, mark new and reinvigorated departures for material culture studies. It is this new, revitalized sub-discipline of anthropology that, through its dialectical engagement and transformation of its subject, has done much, and can be expected to do much more in charting new courses not only for ethnographic but for other museum presentations too. Whereas forty years ago, William Sturtevant raised the question of whether anthropology still needed museums, we can add to his positive, if somewhat apprehensive affirmation, that museums also need anthropology.”
(As cited in Macdonald, 2011:79)

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In 1991, Ivan Karp and Stephen Lavine co-edited a volume, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. This volume, cited by nearly every author in this section of the literature review, offers a broad range of topics, which contribute to the discussions surrounding anthropology's impact on museum exhibitions. In one section of the volume, Karp, an anthropologist himself, points out that museums typically have two choices when exhibiting diverse culture: to assimilate or exoticize (Karp & Lavine, 1991: 375). He explains further that "assimilation runs the risk of losing the diversity of cultures, but exoticizing may serve to perpetuate myths" of other cultures. In another chapter, authors from the Smithsonian examine the heart of authenticity in museums, and point out that authenticity is not about factuality or reality, but about authority, and that the museum is the authority. Michael Ames adds to the discussion of authenticity. In his article *Museology Interrupted*, he writes, "arguments about ways of knowing... are as much about competition for status and power as they are claims to authenticity. 'in times of great social change,' Merton (1972: 9) observed in his classic paper on insider and outsider views, 'claims to truth become politicized.'" (Ames, 2005: 48)

In a review of Karp and Lavine's volume, Miriam Kahn (1992) writes, "there seems to be an ethnocentric complacency about the volume, as though only the West has been guilty of taking its own cultural perspective and misrepresenting others'. None of the papers address the fact that to be postmodernly multiperspective is not perspective-free, but simply another phase in the history of Western knowledge" (Kahn, 1992: 775). Kahn contends that to be "perspective-free" is inherently impossible. Instead, museums must realize that they reconfigure relationships between people, objects, and places.

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The explanation and definition of culture has been historically problematic. This evasive, intangible concept is the link between anthropological theory and ethnographic exhibitions in museums. In a very thorough analysis of the complex concept of representation, Stuart Hall (1997) explains how representation and culture are inextricably connected. Simply put, Hall describes culture as being about “shared meanings” (Hall, 1997: 15), which are communicated and processed through cognitive systems and language systems. Referring to the *Circuit of Culture* (see Figure 1), Hall argues that meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several processes or practices. In regard to representation, especially material representation, Hall concludes that, “the main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice- a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean.” (Hall, 1997:24). Therefore, museums are directly involved in the production of culture, as much as they are responsible for presenting it.

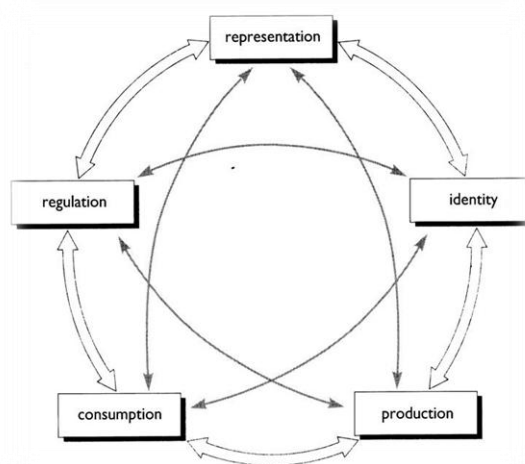


Figure 1: The Circuit of Culture. Source: Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (1999). Stuart Hall (Ed.) page 1

Andrea Witcomb offers a theoretically-grounded explanation of how museums produce culture in her chapter, “A Place for All of us?” (2007). She connects the dialectical

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arguments of Tony Bennett and James Clifford on the museum's role in production of culture, based on her own experiences curating an exhibit about Portuguese Immigrants in western Australia. While Tony Bennett espouses the idea that museums are part of civic reform, with cultural workers and government officials working to educate citizens (1995; 1998), James Clifford sees museums as "contact zones" where museums and communities intersect (1997). Witcomb contends that as museums promote cultural diversity, they are in fact creating the notion that cultural diversity actually exists, as much as they are representing its existence. She claims that this phenomenon is in fact what curatorial work fundamentally does, as it is "the nature of the curatorial process itself- a process that challenged the idea that representation was a natural, rather than a constructed process" (Witcomb, 2007:137). In her examples of the Community Access Gallery, she says that "museums need to be understood not as institutions which represent communities and culture- which create a place for all of us- but as institutions that actually produce the notion of community and culture" (Witcomb, 2007: 134) As communities are able to represent themselves in these settings, the museum is actually producing the picture of these communities which must come together to form these displays. In the author's connection, the Portuguese 'community' in west Australia was in fact very detached from 'itself' in that there were smaller groups within the larger umbrella group, which was only a group as it was defined by the museum as people coming from the same country, even though these immigrants came from different parts of the country, at different times, etc.

Furthermore, discussions surrounding the amount of context to be represented with cultural objects in cultural exhibits addresses themes of anthropology. The meanings of objects shift according to their contextual display. John Paul Rangel, paraphrasing Walter

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Benjamin's arguments from 1968, writes, "the power to remove products of material culture from one specific context to another, as with cultural objects in an ethnographic museum exhibit, is an important tool for maintaining Euro-American hegemony" (Rangel, 2012: 34). His discussion centers on the difference in meaning between the portrayal of Native arts through a Western lens, which creates an imagined past where Native people are "static, immutable parts of colonial history and conquest" (Rangel, 2012: 34) in comparison to the displays in "indigenized spaces" of community-run museums.

In her 2008 article, under a section titled, *The Post-Modern Museum: An Unfinished Edifice*, Ann McMullen thoughtfully describes this link in the trajectories of Museological and Anthropological thought. She writes, "With anthropology's shift from its 'savage slot' (Trouillot 1991) and 'a science of disappearing societies' (Fabian 1991:193) to a focus on contextualizing today's multicultural and hybrid societies, museums—as public educational institutions—bear a special burden in bringing theoretical and disciplinary advances to wider audiences." (McMullen, 2008: 54) She adds that as Anthropology has become post-colonial, so too have museum undertakings, but that institutional infrastructures of museums make them much slower to change than individual anthropological researchers. In conjunction with increased awareness of indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and desire for self-representation, McMullen cites the pivotal work of Michael Ames being imperative to the post-colonial status shift of museums. However, at this time, the museum staff were almost exclusively comprised of "majority, settler societies," and only occasionally hired Native people as consultants (Bennett 1988; Lavine & Karp 1991; McMullen 2008; Pearce 1992; Price 1989; Sherman & Rogoff 1994; Simpson 2001).

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In an effort to decolonize the museum, museums began to hire indigenous people as performers and craft-demonstrators in response to criticism (Hill 2000a, 2000b; Simpson 2001). However, this practice was met with the realization that it reaffirmed distinctions between otherness, rather than self-representation within exhibitions. McMullen writes that, “by the late 1980s, museums found new ways to consult, engaging individual Native advisors, advisory committees, and guest curators (Ames 2005; Hill 2000a, 2000b; Kahn 2000b; Krech 1994; Phillips 2003; Simpson 2001) and moved toward ‘speaking about’ subject peoples rather than for them (Ames 1992; Clifford 1997, 2004; Hedlund 1994),” (McMullen, 2008: 55). Throughout the following decade, consultation with communities became fairly conventional (McMullen 2008; Clifford 2004; Fienup-Riordan 1999; Kahn 2000), and diversity in “voice” and allowing subjects to “speak for themselves” became buzzwords for politically correct museological practice (Ames 1990, 1992, 1994; Clifford 1997; Hedlund 1994; Kreps 2003; Lavine 1991; McMullen 2008; Phillips 2003; West 1993, 1994). Consultation and collaboration with communities in museum practice is extremely significant to this study, and will be addressed in more depth in the next section of this literature review.

Postcolonialism: Consultation and Collaboration

“Until museums do more than consult (often after the curatorial vision is firmly in place),” James Clifford states in his “Museums as Contact Zones” (1997:207-8), “until they bring a wider range of historical experiences and political agendas into the actual planning of exhibits and the control of museum collections, they will be perceived as merely paternalistic by people whose contact history with museums has been one of exclusion and condescension.” There will be no easy solution, he warns.” (Ames, 1999: 42)

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In museological literature, indigenous communities are referred to as source communities, communities of origin, and descendant communities. Interestingly, nearly all of the literature surrounding cultural consultation and collaboration in museums centers on native or indigenous groups in colonized regions. Making the connection between standards of consultation and collaboration with indigenous groups, and immigrant and second-generation cultural consultation is lacking in peer-reviewed literature. As postmodernism has brought a categorical rejection of meta-narratives of colonialism, cultural hierarchies, and objective knowledge, these groups have been increasingly involved in museum practice, especially in regard to collections management practices, educational and interpretation strategies, and exhibition techniques (Ames 1994, 1999; Brown 2003; Karp & Lavine 1991; Khan 2000; Kreps 2011; Krouse 2006; McMullen 2008; Simpson 2001).

Furthermore, the progression of a “post-colonial morality” (Ames 1994; Brown 2003) collaboration and consultation have entered the realm of institutional codes of ethics and professional and federal museum standards on an international level, which call for increased sensitivity to communities. The Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG), based in the UK, has incorporated stipulations for consultation with indigenous parties into their ethics statement, *Guidance Notes on Ethical Approaches in Museum Ethnography*, as well as a list of case studies for reference (2003: 166). In section 4.1 of the ‘Guidance Notes,’ the MEG states that those who work for or govern museums should “consult and involve groups from communities they serve and their representatives to promote a sense of shared ownership in the work of the museum” (Museum Ethnographer’s Group, 2003: 165). Additionally, Michael Ames stresses the importance for museums and First Peoples to

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“work together to correct inequalities and accept the philosophy of co-management and co-responsibility” (2000:74), citing the 1992 Joint Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association’s *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*. The United Nations’ *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008) has been noted as indicative of the moral standards applicable to museums and other institutions, and Michael F. Brown (2003) cites the Australian Government’s policy of “Reconciliation” as a certain reason behind museums’ attitudes towards cultural material property.

In the United States, the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 spurred more reflexive practices regarding collections holding Native American cultural materials (Buck 2010; McMullen 2008). However, the American Alliance of Museum does not make the same calls for consultation and collaboration as other countries. Many authors agree that there are significant practical aspects that are beneficial results from collaboration with communities. Brown et. al. (2005) describe collections management practices at the National Museum of the American Indian that, following deliberate consultation with native groups, were significantly improved. While noting certain challenges to balance institutional practices with the concerns of the Native communities, the resulting knowledge gain was substantial.

In 2007, Elizabeth Scott and Edward Luby published the results of a study that examined the extent to which museums in the United States were making organizational adjustments concerning the management of long-term relationships with Native communities. The survey of more than 150 museums also examines the nature of interactions between museums and communities, and draws conclusions about which practices and structures are most effective. Their study showed that

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“while museums consider long-term relationships with Native communities to be important, they are not making the structural adjustments to ensure that such relationships are secure and long-lasting. The main challenges include an absence of policy on issues of critical concern to Native communities, a lack of procedures in many museums for formalizing staff knowledge about relationships when staff leave their positions, and organizational structures that do not live up to their full potential.” (Scott and Luby, 2007: 265).

The study determined that collaborations and education were central to the most effective museum models. Additionally, the authors attributed the lack of structural accommodation for collaboration to the fact that “none of the AAM initiatives specifically emphasizes the development of relationships with Native communities. Therefore, in the United States, there is no national policy framework outlining how partnerships between museums and indigenous people should develop, such as those that exist in Canada (Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association 1992) or Australia (Council of Australian Museums Associations, Inc. 1993; Museums Australia 2005)” (Luby & Scott, 2007:270). Furthermore, Scott and Luby assert that among the most essential aspect of these relationships is for both sides of the collaboration to engage equally, and that collaborations should be “flexible, comprehensive, and sustained” (Luby & Scott, 2007:266).

Supporting this finding, Michael Ames points to existing problematic realities of collaboration in museums. He writes, “museums have typically preferred the Wizard of Oz technique: exhibits present the anonymous voice of authority, while in reality texts are constructed by one or more curators hiding behind the screens of the institution. As ideas about ‘multi-vocality,’ ‘inter-textuality,’ and ‘hybridity’ become more popular, more wizards may be added, including honorary Indigenous representatives recruited from

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outside the academy. Nevertheless museums continue in many cases to set the agendas, manage recruiting processes, and control the final editing and presentation of exhibits. It is the nature of bureaucracies to protect their prerogatives” (Ames, 2005: 48). In addition to the fact that the museum ultimately gets the final say, many museums that espouse partnership and collaboration are actually referring to arrangements that support their pre-determined agendas (Ames, 2003). Through case study analysis and other ethnographic research, Laura Peers and Alison Brown published their book, *Museums and Source Communities* in 2005. Among other insights, the authors prescribe three primary things that will shape collaboration between museums and source communities: the nature of the source community, the political relationship between the community and the museum, and the geographical proximity of the museum to the community.

However, many authors note the need for the institutional culture to shift as well. Hodges, writing in 1978 contends that most of the initial changes occurred in educational departments, “thus, such leadership does not necessarily reflect general policy revisions or new commitments by museums hierarchies and trustee boards. Museum departments of anthropology have remained relatively aloof, “ (Hodges, 1978: 150). In *Shaping collaboration: Considering Institutional Culture*, (2005) Julia Harrison contends that in addition to the three contingencies of collaboration described by Peers and Brown, that the distinctive culture of the individual museum affects the efficacy and sustainability of collaboration. In her experience with 2 collaborative projects undertaken at the Calgary’s Glenbow Museum with the Blackfoot peoples of southern Albert and Montana, and at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, BC with the Nuu-chah-nulth people of the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Harrison notes that all museums emerged from the same

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trajectory, and they are often “essentialized as a homogenous entity, having a somewhat generic character” (Harrison, 2005: 196). However, citing Andrea Witcomb, she offers a “corollary that meaning making in museums is a very complicated and variable process, suggests that all museums should not be seen as homogenous entities, just because they share the same historical trajectory, colonial burden, and in recent decades, a new professional mandate” (Witcomb, 2003: 26). In her comparison, Harrison contends that the institutional culture comes into play in the collaborative process, just as much as the intentions and efforts of the communities.

There are numerous case studies of collaborative exhibition projects with museums and their communities (Ames 1999; Clapperton 2010; Conaty 1989; Dunstan 1999; Graburn 2012; Pigliasio, Carlo, & Lipp 2011; Kahn 2000; McMullen 2008; Mithlo 2004; Phillips 2003; Rangel 2012; Redman 2007; Seagraves 2009; Simpson 2001). The majority of these case studies highlight positive aspects of the process, while only some reveal aspects that didn’t work. Moira Simpson’s volume, *Making Representations* (2001) provides numerous examples of collaborative projects. She primarily highlights successful examples of community and museum collaboration, and only mentions problematic results from these endeavors at the end of her discussion. For example, in Chapter 3, Simpson admits that an overly romantic vision of the past, loss of curatorial control, and the continuation of unequal power relationships between communities and museums all took place (Simpson 2001). She presents a one-way model of collaboration, which negates the purpose of collaboration in the first place.

Brown and Peers discuss a few key concepts surrounding relationships between museums and source communities. Namely, the requirement that partnerships be mutually

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beneficial, and engagement be reciprocal. Just as communities help inform museum knowledge of material culture, museological displays of culture help shape the future of those cultures' existence (Peers and Brown, 2007: 520). The authors highlight the advantages of partnerships over superficial inclusion. In a very recent article, Professor of Anthropology and director of the White Mountain Apache Tribe's museum in Arizona, Karl Hoerig maintains that majority museums need to move past current model of tribal collaboration in exhibit development to one of full reciprocity, in which both tribal and nontribal museums and communities fully contribute to and benefit from exhibitions (Hoerig, 2010). He reasons that while majority museums have employed native consultants to strengthen the "interpretive value" of their exhibitions, tribal communities have adopted and adapted the Western concept of the museum to meet heritage preservation and perpetuation goals, but largely without access to the same wealth of objects held by nontribal institutions (Hoerig, 2010: 65). Amy Lonetree's volume, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (2012) highlights the subjectivity and impact of individual experiences of museum professionals and community members in productivity of collaborative projects. Lonetree demonstrates that "while collaboration can lead to the transfer of authority with regard to the manner in which the final representations find form, it may do so at the expense of the efficacy of the museum exhibition as a decolonizing apparatus" (Nichols & Parezo, 2013: 448).

Further complicating the discussion on collaboration and partnership with communities, Shelley Ruth Butler points out that there are "subtle forms of engagement between cultural producers and consumers that outwit a politics of objectification, as well as simple notions of dialogue" (Butler, 2000: 89). Due to the fact that traditional museums

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prohibit touch, she points out that viewing other cultures from the inherent distance of an exhibit runs the risk of voyeurism (Butler, 2000: 89). Additionally, multiple authors contend that due to the historical imperialist relationship between museums and communities, that equality in collaboration is impossible (Ames 1994; Harrison 2005; Kahn 1992, 2000; Todd 1990). In fact, Michael Ames, citing Deborah Todd, points out that universalism and equality are inherently western notions altogether. In his discussion on “the untranslatability of difference” in *The Politics of Difference: Other Voices in a Not Yet Post-Colonial World* (1994), he notes that notions of equality and universalism are inherently western, and exclude aboriginal definitions of equality which support the freedom to be different, and not assimilate. "Cultural autonomy," Loretta Todd (1990: 24) writes, "signifies a right to cultural specificity, a right to one's origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without" (Ames, 1994: 2).

Furthermore, where do tribal and community-based museums fit into this movement of collaboration? Having recently attended the Annual Alliance of Museums annual meeting, there were several sessions showcasing museum's experiences with collaboration in exhibit development. Following one of the sessions, a representative from a distinguished tribal museum and research center introduced herself to the room during the question and answer portion of the panel session. She described her own experienced with other, majority museums who sought to collaborate with her institution on exhibitions attempting to tell the stories of several tribal groups from the state. She explained that the collaborations resulted in her staff having to facilitate a form of others' grief over what had happened to their people. She stated that it is simply impossible to amalgamate narratives with outsiders, and that this was work that [tribal organizations]

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need to do themselves. In light of this very study, her words resonated intensely. As some of the literature in earlier sections of this paper demonstrated, often, collaborative projects stem from museums' institutional agendas, and therefore support institutional prerogatives. Despite the collaborative nature of the development, the desire to display the narratives is initially from the museum. Collaboration is a step in the right direction in addressing issues central to museum representation, but what is the next step? Sleeper-Smith touches on the impact tribal museums have had on the situation, in her edited volume, *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* (2009). Essays in the third section of the volume focus on the work of tribal museums that challenge and colonialist impositions of North American history while serving the varied needs of the indigenous communities.

In her recent paper, Lainie Schultz makes a very important point about collaboration with the visitor. Schultz argues that, "by pledging themselves to community-based collaboration, museums indicate their ongoing commitment to it as a form of social activism, reflecting their belief that its relevance extends beyond those immediately participating in the process. Such a belief implies the need for the visiting public to be a part of the process, a group that is frequently overlooked in discussions of collaboration" (Schultz, 2011: 1) Through her experiences with the project, "A Partnership of Peoples" at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Schultz argues that visitors require facilitated interaction and engagement in order to benefit from the new collaborative strategies of the museum. Responsiveness to museum visitors, and engagement of visitors is discussed further in the following section of the literature review.

New Museology

Revisiting David Julian Hodges work from 1978, he discusses the emergence of what he calls the “New Museum,” (Hodges, 1978: 148). Citing the lack of challenge and change to museums previously, he states, “this lethargy in the face of an expanding public interest in the work of museums has given rise to criticism of the traditional purposes and functions of these institutions from within the museum profession itself and from without. A result has been the fashioning of new museum facilities and programs throughout the nation,” (Hodges, 1978: 148). Interestingly, he is among the only authors covered in this literature review to actually connect anthropology on one hand, and the people, he refers to as “minorities” on the other through museums. He writes, “These new museums represent a challenge and an opportunity for anthropology and for minorities. For anthropology, the challenge resides in the opportunity to establish new research priorities. For minorities, the opportunity resides in discovering a new relevance in institutions formerly perceived as elitist.” (Hodges, 1978: 148). Furthermore, Hodges describes the “New Museum” as not a place, but a concept that is highly relevant for minorities. He continues,

“The new museum is usually participatory, refusing to surrender to the lockstep of “look, but don't touch!” It is multidimensional, an environment which favors any resource that facilitates understanding ... Minorities then, skeptical about the relevance of traditional museums from the outset, are likely to find these new facilities and approaches more inviting, in many cases more convenient, and almost without exception more relevant to their lives and experiences ... Further, it is clear that much more is at stake for minorities in their search for their cultural identities through visits to museums,” (Hodges, 1978: 155)

Hodges was a critical thinker before his time. *New Museology* is a concept well known today, and discussed frequently by contemporary museologists. New Museology calls for increased social inclusion, responsiveness, and relevance for museums’

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communities. Ruth Phillips writes of a “second museum age,” in her article, *Re-placing objects: historical practices for the second museum age* (2005) proposing that “museums are a microcosm of the wider society in which inter-ethnic relations are played out through a struggle over interpretation and control of cultural resources” (Phillips, 2005: 90). In a recent article, Phillips has argued that the new democratic, collaborative, and non-essentializing policies of some museums are diagnostic of the beginning of a second museum age” (Shelton, in Macdonald, 2011: 79).

Susan Applegate Krouse published an article, *Anthropology and the New Museology* (2006), comparing four pivotal books centered on New Museology, and its underlying concepts. Her analysis included Christina Kreps’ *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation and Heritage Preservation* (2003); Richard Sandell’s edited volume, *Museums, Society, Inequality* (2002); Moira Simpson’s *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (revised 2001); and Andrea Witcomb’s *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (2003). Krouse notes that while efforts are expanding across the museum field to increase responsiveness to broader audiences, and incorporate a more multi-voiced approach to representation, there are varying interpretations of what this means as well as initiatives in place to facilitate these efforts. Although some authors emphasize museum practice, and others highlight theory, Krouse writes, “whether we focus on theory or methodology, the new museology represents a particularly anthropological approach to museum work, emphasizing the collaboration of museums and communities, the importance of multiple voices, and the recognition of the rights of people to be included in and consulted about the presentation and preservation of their heritage” (Krouse, 2006: 170).

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Richard Sandell is well-known for his contributions to the discussion of New Museology. Sandell focuses more on methodology than theory, as Krouse refers to it as an “activist approach,” (Krouse, 2006: 179). Sandell argues that part of the social responsibility of museums is not to just function as a tool of the government, but to advocate for the contemporary values of society, particularly social equality. Part 3 of his volume, *Museums, Society and Equality* (2002) Sandell projects to the future of museums, pushing for development of better policies for social inclusion, positioning museums to act as agents of change, re-evaluation of relationships with indigenous peoples, and shifting away from object-centered strategies towards a people-centered approach (Krouse, 2006). In a review of the volume, Gordon Fyfe discusses Sandell’s positive thesis on the creativity of museums, “he argues that they can be agencies of social change provided that they substitute access for inclusion,” noting that “inclusion entails a reflexive curatorial practice that incorporates diversity (for example, gender, physicality, and childhood) whilst acknowledging the museum’s distinctive capacity to order the world” (Fyfe, 2003: 992).

Moira Simpson’s work, *Making Representations* (2001) emphasizes the importance of working with indigenous communities. As Krouse notes, “in her conclusion, Simpson looks to the future, seeing increased interaction between museums and communities. She points out that this cooperation has already resulted in the preservation of cultural heritage, revitalization of art forms, increased access to collections and information, and increased learning by museums as the result of collaboration. She ponders whether museums of the future will be artifact or people focused, clearly advocating for the latter” (Krouse, 2006: 172). In contrast to Simpson, Kreps proposes expanding responsiveness and multi-vocality through learning from indigenous models, through *Comparative*

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Museology. Her work, *Liberating Culture* (2003) discusses museums as a site for the process of decolonization (where Simpson uses post-colonial), citing incorporation of indigenous models of exhibition and collections management in western museums. Additionally, her discussion is self-reflexive, paying attention to her own perspectives. Furthermore, Kreps promotes the role of museums in promoting overall community development, which she defines as “improving the material and social condition of a society through planned social change” (Kreps, 2003: 116). As Krouse succinctly summarizes, this “development must incorporate the needs of each community and must include a cultural base and an emphasis on cultural heritage. The model of the lumbung served as a basis to promote the idea of a museum to the community, in a way that is community based, rather than being imposed from an outside centralized authority” (Krouse, 2006: 174).

Among other collaboration case study literature, certain aspects of New Museology are ignored. For example, many aspects of New Museology highlight a focus on the visitor experience. In Anderson and Krmpotich’s discussion of their experience with *The Case of Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* exhibit, they discuss that while the collaborative process through developing the exhibit was enlightening and an overall positive experience for the museum staff and the community consultants, these benefits were not carried through to visitors to the exhibit. Interviews with visitors to the exhibit demonstrated that “museum visitors rarely recognized the extent of the collaboration, and thus rarely equated Nitsitapiisinni with concepts of self-representation or self-determination” (Anderson and Krmpotich, 2005: 377). While other messages of the impacts of colonialism and revitalization efforts of the Blackfoot Culture were translated, the visitors still interpreted

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the messages as coming from the museum, and not necessarily from the Blackfoot community.

In Fienup-Riordan's presentation of the experience of the Yup'ik mask exhibit, *Agayuliyararpu*, she describes the varying reception of the exhibit as it traveled to three different museums across the nation. The author, citing Clifford, discusses the problematic issues involving taking the very localized narrative across the country, to three very different museums, including a natural history museum, an art museum, and a more local community center, claiming that "the history of particular contemporary tribal meanings was subsumed within the story of great Native American art (Clifford, 1991:232). While her point that in order for "the 'insider's perspective' of a locally grounded exhibit to survive, majority institutions must not only display the results of collaboration but participate in the process" (Fienup-Riordan, 1999: 339) is well received, the author fails to acknowledge the subjectivity of each of the institutions on the tour, and their on local communities. The understanding that visiting public comes to the museum with their own interpretations and experiences that shape their museum experience is an important tenet of New Museology. Furthermore, the author mentions that in "almost everyone at Toksook Bay [the community center] came primarily to participate in a dance festival, not to see an exhibit. True, the masks evoked stories and memories deeply embedded in local meanings, but they were also seen for what they were- stage props, special but not sacred" (Fienup-Riordan, 1999: 354). Visitors have their own agendas and reasons for visiting museum, and these can affect the meaning making experiences for each individual.

Michael Ames presents an example of visitors' agency in interpreting and meaning making. In *Museology Interrupted* (2005) Ames illustrates this phenomenon at Colonial

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Williamsburg. Ames discusses how museums are caught between functions of the theme park and the university; straddling the tasks of presenting authenticity and the spectacular. He writes, “in opposition to popular theme parks and their status rivals in universities, museums find themselves increasingly dependent upon objects they must proclaim as authentic and therefore important, and over which they assert their institutional authority as the leading experts” (Ames, 2005: 45). He notes that at Colonial Williamsburg, staff “go to great pains to present an authentic and generalized history interpreted by professional historians working out of a positivist scholarly paradigm” (Ames, 2005: 47), but that in a study from 2000, Gable and Handler noted a striking difference between messages of history presented by the Colonial Williamsburg historic site and the memories their visitors carried away. Ames maintains that museums can present neutral history, but visitors will leave with confirmed memories of other previously learned stories related to the content (Ames, 2005: 47). He continues,

“The memories of their visits people reported to Gable and Handler, in contrast, were more likely to be associated with cherished souvenirs purchased on earlier visits, with stories their parents told about their visits, or with memories of history learned in school. Disregarding curatorial intentions, visitors appeared to freely reconstruct what they saw and heard in terms of personal narrative interests. Williamsburg’s official history thus appeared to serve less as a source of authentic information and more as a set of triggers for memories of stories originating elsewhere.” (Ames, 2005: 47-48)

Shelley Ruth Butler speaks to this issue, questioning why museums continue to strive for a curatorial agenda. Her experiences with two controversial, reflexive exhibitions, *Into the Heart of Africa*, which showed at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1989 and 1990, and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture*, which showed at the South African National Gallery in 1996 offer insights into the potential and inherent problems

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connected with critical, reflexive museology's efforts to decolonize museums. She explains that critical museology associates museums with a politics of domination, especially in regards to how the West exhibits non-western cultures (Butler, 2000: 74), but that museum visitors actually view exhibits and culture from myriad different viewpoints. She contends that much of critical museology assumes a certain audience, and fails to credit the diversity of visitor's viewpoints. She suggests that "viewers will be viewers, interpreting exhibits as they please," and asks her reader if there is a point to critical curating and pedagogy if this is the case. Ultimately, Butler contends that, "it is useful to acknowledge that curating, like teaching, should never be an authoritative exercise that imposes views on others. It is also important to recognize that curating, like teaching, is never value-free, and some critical approaches (whether in the classroom or the museum) are more compelling and stronger than others. Stronger exhibits will have more impact on visitors; but, in any exhibition, curators cannot expect to receive uniform responses. Audiences are heterogeneous, and spectatorship is both individual and highly contextual" (Butler, 2000: 82).

Graham Black introduces his 2012 work, *Transforming Museums in the 21st Century*, with an introduction, titled "Change or Die." He maintains that museums must focus on two forms of sustained engagement in order to maintain their social relevance: 1) the externalisation of purpose of the museum, driven by engagement with its publics and ultimately with the communities it serves (Pitman and Hirzy 2011: vi); and 2) the self-initiated, self-directed, self-sustaining, collaborative engagement between the museum and its users. He asserts that as a result of the impacts of new technologies and rapid

societal developments, museums will lose touch with their publics unless they make these changes.

Pacific Voices at The Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture

Pacific Voices opened to the public at the Burke Museum in November of 1997.

Pacific Voices tells the stories of the peoples of the Pacific Rim region who have a substantial presence in the Puget Sound area from the perspectives and experiences of members those communities themselves. Through a collaborative process, staff at the Burke and members of the community spent six years planning the exhibit (Kahn, 2000).

Pacific Voices addresses numerous anthropological questions about identity, community empowerment, and the politics of representation in museum setting. The development and organization of this exhibit was viewed as cutting edge in the museum field upon its opening (Dobkins, 1999). As a response to academic critique from postmodern anthropology (Kahn, 2000; Krouse, 2006; McMullen, 2008), museologists were beginning to incorporate consultation and collaboration with source communities in interpretative and educational development strategies. *Pacific Voices* was an exceptional case, where members of 17 different relevant communities from the Puget Sound participated in the planning at the same level of involvement as the curators and designers. In 1999 a review of *Pacific Voices*, curator and professor of anthropology, Rebecca Dobkins wrote,

“[Curator-in-charge, Miriam Kahn, along with fellow curators Karl Hutterer, James Nason, Marvin Oliver, Julie Stein, and Robin Wright, and project manager Erin Younger, decided] to involve the relevant communities, de-center curatorial authority, and develop ways to let the subjects speak for themselves. While these principles are now certainly standard practice in contemporary museum anthropology, the degree to which the Burke pursued them is unusual and the diversity and breadth of communities

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involved enormous. Their experience offers the rest of the field a remarkable model.” (Dobkins, 1999: 400)

Current Status:

Nearly seventeen years later, *Pacific Voices* is still on display at the Burke Museum.² The Burke Museum is in the planning stages of a large-scale relocation to a new facility within the next ten years, and the future state of *Pacific Voices* is not yet known. Little has changed within the exhibit over the years, except for the removal of a few technologically obsolete elements. However, the exhibits maintain representation of 20 specific cultural examples of sources of cultural identity which fall into three main categories: 1) language and oral traditions, 2) ancestors, elders, and teachers, and 3) ceremonies. The exhibit map indicates these “Homelands” of the Pacific Voices represented in the exhibit: China; Laos; Vietnam; Philippines; Korea; Japan; Micronesia; New Zealand; Samoa; Hawai’i; Northern Alaska; and the Northwest Coast. *Pacific Voices* is about cultural identity, about how we know who we are. During the planning stages of the exhibit, more than 150 advisors from around Puget Sound came together to consider their Pacific Rim heritage in light of the following questions:

How do we get our sense of cultural identity?
How do we pass our cultural identity along to our children?

Source: The Burke Museum, 1998:11 *Pacific Voices* Exhibit Guide

Advisors arrived at the following answers:

² It is important to note that *Pacific Voices* was not intended to be on display permanently, or even as long as it has. However, the fact remains that it *is* currently on view, with minimal updating.

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Language and Stories

- Hawaiian Hula: Language of the Heart
- Lushootseed: Puget Sound's First Language
- Han'gul and Chokobo: Korean Writing and Family Trees
- Breath of our Ancestors: Languages and Oral Tradition
- Kohanga Reo: Maori Language Nests

Teachers and Elders

- Northwest Coast Artists: Carriers of Tradition
- Pacific Island Voyagers: Masters of Sea and Land
- Vietnamese Ancestors: Guides of Life

Ceremonies

- Philippine Santo Nino: Festival of the Holy Child
- Inupiaq Whaling: Honoring the Whale
- First Salmon Ceremony: Honoring the Salmon People
- Potlatch: Honoring Family Names
- Korean Hollye: Wedding Ceremony
- Samoan Saofa'i: Bestowing Chiefly Titles
- Chinese New Year: Family Reunion
- Japanese Obon: Celebrating Life
- Boun Bang Fai: Lao Fire Rocket Festival

Source: The Burke Museum, 1998:11 *Pacific Voices* Exhibit Guide

All of these aspects are currently represented in the exhibit through modern and traditional objects, as well as oral narratives presented through videos, songs, activities, and stories. There are evolving educational materials and activities available for school groups that visit the exhibit, as well as opportunities for engagement outside of the museum.

Maintaining Relevance Over Time

It is clear from the history of this exhibit, as well as the museum's reputation for involvement and transparency with the community in other practices, that the Burke Museum is very invested in its community stakeholders. The approach to this exhibit at the

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time of its inception was a point of special attention for the degree of inclusion of the community, and the degree of shared curatorial authority (Dobkins, 2000). What is not known is how, or if, the Burke Museum has maintained this status of relevance and inclusion over the course the exhibit's run. Additionally, as the Burke Museum endeavored to ensure that *Pacific Voices* displayed relevant and authentic information, it is not known how the museum has continued to ensure the relevance of these cultural narratives as time has passed. *Pacific Voices* has been on display for nearly 17 years with relatively minimal updating. What would the response be if the same cultural advisors reviewed the exhibit today, or a younger generation representing the same cultures did? How would the cultural content resonate with individuals who self-identify with those cultures today? Has collaborative exhibition development, as a response to anthropological critique, provided a long-term solution for the issues of representation posed?

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this research is to investigate community self-representation in long-term ethnographic museum exhibitions. To accomplish this, the research is focused on *Pacific Voices*, a collaborative exhibition on display at the Burke Museum as a case study example. This research sought to identify the extent to which, and the ways in which, collaboratively designed exhibitions maintain relevance with represented cultural groups throughout their course of public display.

The research questions touch on broad conceptions of cultural identity and representation in museums, as well as targeted questions surrounding the *Pacific Voices* exhibition itself.

Research Questions:

1. How does community representation of cultural identity in the museum setting **resonate** with individual manifestation of cultural identity?
2. To what extent can long-term ethnographic exhibits maintain **relevance** over time with visitors who are a part of the cultural groups being represented within the exhibit?

Pacific Voices

This study centers on qualitative investigative inquiry. Data collection instruments included interviews of participants following a self-guided walk-through of the exhibit, *Pacific Voices*. Participants were asked to walk through the exhibit, paying attention to the content and interpretation, as well as their own reactions and responses to exhibit content.

Sample

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The University of Washington has 865 Registered Student Organizations (RSO's), commonly referred to as student clubs,

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registered for the academic year 2013/14. Eighty-four of these organizations, nearly 10% are designated to the Cultural/International category. Using the University of Washington's RSO online listings, the researcher selected student organizations that were deliberately and transparently affiliated with one or more of the 17 cultures represented in the "homelands" of the *Pacific Voices* exhibit. Out of the 84 organizations in the Cultural/International category, 13 met the criteria for the study. These 13 organizations included the Chinese Student Association, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, the Filipino American Student Association, the First Nations at UW, the Hong Kong Student Association, the Hui Hoaloha 'Ulana, the Japanese Student Association, Kojobs, the Korean Student Association, the Micronesian Islands Club, the Nikkei Student Union, the Polynesian Student Alliance, and the Vietnamese Student Association.

Students from the University of Washington were intentionally recruited for participation in this study. Due to the fact that the Burke Museum is an academic institution, located on the University of Washington campus, it is interested in involvement of the student population. In this light, the RSOs presented a unique and convenient opportunity to seek information from groups represented within the exhibit. Furthermore, since the RSOs are already categorized under the Cultural/International designation, members of each RSO have publicly self-identified with the respective cultures through membership in the RSO.

It is important to note that the representation of RSOs contacted for this study is not uniform across all of the "homelands" categories. In some cases, such as with China, there were multiple student organizations which are culturally affiliated with China, and therefore three separate RSO's were contacted. In the case of the 2 "homelands" Northern

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Alaska and the Norwest Coast, only the First Nations at UW RSO was culturally representative. Unfortunately, one of the “homelands” of cultures portrayed in the exhibit, Laos, did not have an RSO counterpart. Table 1 shows the “homelands” of Pacific Voices and the RSO(s) contacted for each:

“Homelands” of the <i>Pacific Voices</i>	RSO’s Contacted
China	Hong Kong Student Association Chinese Student Association Chinese Students and Scholars Association
Vietnam	Vietnamese Student Association
Philippines	Filipino American Student Association
Korea	Kojobs Korean Student Association
Japan	Japanese Student Association Nikkei Student Union
Micronesia	Micronesian Islands Club
New Zealand	Polynesian Student Alliance
Samoa	
Hawai’i	Hui Hoaloha ‘Ulana
Northern Alaska	First Nations at UW
Northwest Coast	

Table 1: “Homelands” of *Pacific Voices* and RSO Counterparts

Each of the organizations’ pages listed up to five student officers and their email addresses. All of the officers of these 13 organizations were contacted with a similar recruitment message. Officers were asked to share the information about the study with the members of their respective student organizations. It was made clear that these individuals and their clubs were selected based on their proclaimed cultural affiliation, and that participation was completely voluntary.³

Sixty-four student officers from thirteen RSOs were contacted directly, and asked to forward the information about the study and how to participate in it to members of their

³ Text from the recruitment email is presented in the appendix of this paper.

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RSO. Between one and four officers from ten of the contacted organizations responded. Most noted that they themselves were too busy to participate, but confirmed that they had passed the information along to the members of their organization. The total number of students who received the recruitment information is unknown. Ultimately, a total of six individuals participated in the study. One is a member of Hui Hoaloha 'Ulana (HUI, also known as Hawai'i Club), and four are members of the Polynesian Student Alliance (PSA). Furthermore, due to the snowball nature of the sampling technique, one participant, is not part of the RSO system, but is the former president of the Polynesian Student Alliance, and this year serves as the student Director for the ASUW Pacific Islander Commission, which is comprised of the Filipino American Student Association (FASA), Hui Hoaloha 'Ulana Club (HUI), Micronesian Islands Club (MIC), and the Polynesian Student Alliance (PSA). All participants are currently undergraduate students at the University of Washington. Participants' names and other personal information will remain private throughout this paper.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with 6 participants, followed by a walk through of the exhibit. The interviews were open ended- semi structured in nature, and therefore allowed for some flexibility in interview prompts. These questions, informed by the overall research questions included topics of sources of cultural identity, representation of cultural identity, and personal relevance of *Pacific Voices*.⁴

⁴ The interview prompts are available in the appendix of this paper.

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Protocol

When participants arrived for data collection, the researcher greeted them in the café of the museum. Upon entering the exhibit, prior to the walk through, participants were asked to take ten to fifteen minutes in the space. They were asked to focus on the content and themes of the exhibit, as well as how they reflected on their own cultural identity while in the exhibit.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

The audio recordings of the participants' individual interviews with were transcribed and coded using excel and NVivo data analysis software. This chapter describes study findings in the context of the following research questions: 1) How does community representation of cultural identity in the museum setting **resonate** with individual manifestation of cultural identity? And 2) To what extent can long-term ethnographic exhibits maintain **relevance** over time with visitors who are a part of the cultural groups being represented within the exhibit?

Clear themes emerged from the interview data. Figure 1 presents these categorical themes, which include representation of culture, sources of cultural identity, and the relevance of *Pacific Voices*, as well as the importance of first hand experience in learning about culture. The chart also includes several sub-topics, and areas of overlap among each theme.

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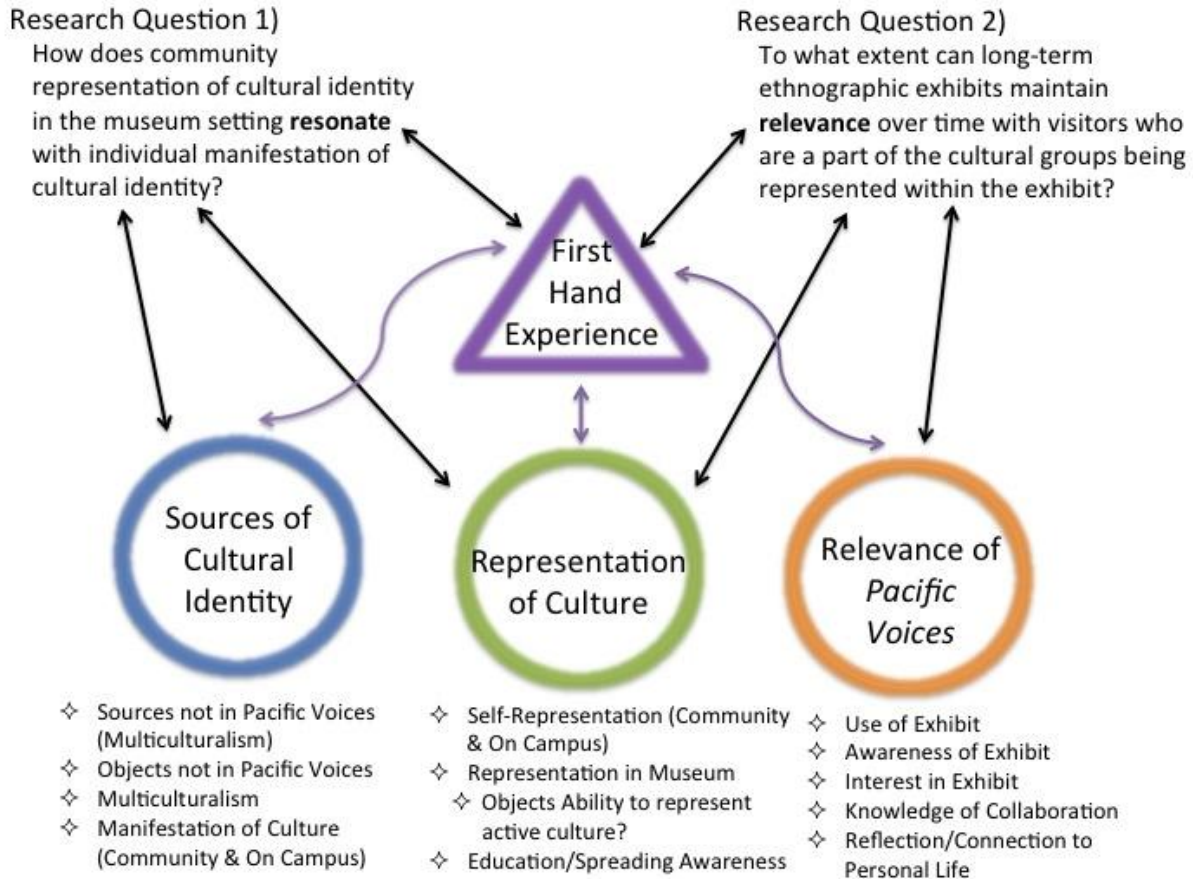


Figure 1: Analysis Chart

Theme 1: Sources of Cultural Identity

Interview participants were asked several questions about sources of their cultural identity outside of what is outlined as the three sources of cultural identity in *Pacific Voices*. From interview data emerged clear sub-themes related to these questions, including a) the impacts of ethnographic museum displays on cultural identity formation, b) strong sources of cultural identity that resonated with interviewees, and c) the manifestation of cultural identity within their community and on campus. Table 2 outlines the categories of responses for each of these sub-themes.

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Emergent Themes	Response Categories
A) Impacts of Ethnographic Museum Display	Appreciation, Inspiration, Limitation, Other
B) Sources of Cultural Identity	Song/Dance, Religion, Respect, Multiculturalism, Community/Demographics
C) Sharing Cultural Knowledge	Seattle Community, RSO Membership, RSO Activities

Table 2: Sources of Cultural Identity Themes and Categories of Responses

A) Impacts of Ethnographic Museum Display on Cultural Identity:

Interview participants were asked how the general display of culture adds to their own conception of cultural identity. There was some overlap in the responses, and some unique opinions. Four of the six participants discussed feeling appreciative of their cultures being represented. Two of these participants personally identify with Samoan culture, and felt proud and appreciative of the fact that Samoan Culture was represented in museums in general, and *Pacific Voices* specifically. Two of the participants identify with Tongan Culture, (one Tongan and Marshallese) and were disappointed that Tongan Culture was not presented in *Pacific Voices*, but that they still appreciate when Pacific Islander cultures are displayed in general. One participant discussed the fact that the display of culture in general makes her reflect on the extent of her own multicultural background, and the ways in which her cultural identity has been shaped by many different traditional cultures. One participant discussed the possibility for displays of culture to define and even misguide people who wish to learn more about their “ancestral” culture, and seek information from museums exclusively. Table 3 presents examples from participants’ responses.

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Impact	Example Quotations
Appreciation	<p>"I feel like just for the fact that we have a Pacific Islander exhibit, it does make me feel a little bit more proud than offended because its like, at least they're trying to educate others on our culture."</p> <p>"It was cool, it just looked like a little shout out, like oh cool they recognized us."</p>
Inspired	"I guess looking at it all separately, it really got me to think how influenced I was from other cultures how I am today. Which was great."
Limiting	<p>"I think it does affect your cultural identity, like especially if you're not that familiar with your own ancestral culture, and you're in a situation where you're trying find that and you look for it in museums, you're going to get a limited sense of you're culture, but then your whole sense and how you identify with that culture is based off of that experience"</p> <p>"I just wish there was other stuff out there, because like my family is from Tonga, and our island isn't even out there... only the very well known islands were represented."</p>
Other	"I'm not going to lie... sometimes I feel like its kind of weird, because we don't see other, like... no offense, but we don't see white people's stuff out there being presented."

Table 3: Impacts of Ethnographic Museum Display on Cultural Identity

B) Sources of Cultural Identity

Interviewees were asked about sources of their cultural identity in general. One interviewee discussed how she felt that *Pacific Voices* did not account for multiculturalism. For example, one interviewee discussed her relationship with Hawaiian culture. She has Japanese heritage, but feels a stronger connection to Hawaiian culture, because she grew up there. She said,

"Yeah, in Hawaii its just different, because we are a lot of different cultures but the community makes the cultures all combined really. I guess I would say that my identity includes everything, just because its what I learned, I guess I just adopted it for myself. Just a big melting pot of all these different cultures; even though I'm not of that culture I still practice it."

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While each of the participants, had distinct cultures that they individually identified with, all of them discussed connections with Pacific Islander culture, Polynesian culture, or cultures of Oceania in general. In light of this, participants were connecting to cultures other than their own as they experienced the exhibit. For example, three interview participants discussed the value of respect in their culture, and they recalled connecting to multiple aspects of *Pacific Voices*, from various cultural displays, which emphasized the value of respect. Even as a more subconsciously engrained cultural value, participants reflected on their connection to the exhibit: “growing up I never really realized that just like the little things that I do I learned from my parents, and just the importance of ‘faka'apa'apa” which means respect in the Tongan language.”

Two participants discussed religion as a strong source of cultural identity. In particular, the activities associated with religion, such as going to church, spending time with family, and participation in gatherings before or after going to church were highlighted as sources of cultural identity. For example, interviewees described going to church as both a means of manifesting their cultural identity, as well as a source of cultural identity formation:

“[We] go to church, and have family dinner right after, its called Toana'i. That's our traditional Sunday, or after church meal, ... I think that's really important to us because it brings us together with family, faith, and food, which are like all our favorite things.”

Additionally, five out of the six interviewees discussed the importance of song and dance as sources of cultural identity. Song and dance were highlighted within *Pacific Voices*, especially pertaining to the Hawaiian Hula. Interview participants identified with this section, through the values inherent in practicing song and dance, despite the fact that they

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do not culturally identify with Hawaiian culture. All four interview participants who were members of the Polynesian Student Alliance noted the importance of song and dance in their lives. One interviewee described dance as a way to connect with family back in Samoa. Despite the growing population of Samoans in Seattle, and a strengthening community on the main land in general, she added that cultural ties are still to Samoa.

“its an embodiment of everything that you are, when dance and song is present. And I think that’s one of the big things in Pacific Islander culture, people think that that’s just for entertainment purposes but its really not. It’s just like your whole being, when you’re singing or dancing or chanting, you become a whole different version of yourself”

In reflecting on cultural identity, interview participants discussed the changing demographics of their cultural community in the Puget Sound. Interviewees noted that at the time that *Pacific Voices* was developing, Pacific Rim cultural representation in the Puget Sound reflected different demographic characteristics than these interview participants are experiencing and contributing to directly. Three of the six interview participants said that they had come to the main land from Samoa and Tonga to attend the university.

“but now that its been what, ten, fifteen years? I'm expecting some change now, the first time I came and saw the exhibit was last year, and I appreciate it I really do, because there's really not a lot of representation physically that you see out of us oceanic people, and so I appreciate it, but now it’s like okay, sixteen years now, lets get a move on guys. And Chamorros, Chamorros [indigenous peoples of the Mariana Islands] have been big since they did this, back in 1996 Chamorros were huge, and they are still huge and growing.”

C) Sharing Cultural Knowledge

For many of the interview participants, sources of cultural identity were one in the same with ways they manifest their cultural identity. In discussion of sources of cultural identity, interview participants described their relationships with their cultural community

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in their every day lives, both on Campus and in Seattle, citing community based functions and fundraisers for family back home. Furthermore, some interviewees discussed their membership to cultural RSOs on campus as a very important piece of their cultural identity. For the most part, being around people who share their cultural heritage was a fortifying source of cultural identity. One interviewee explained,

“We teach each other, because a lot of us don’t know a whole lot about our culture because we grew up on the main land and a lot of us are trying to find that.”

Furthermore, some interviewees discussed their membership to cultural RSOs on campus as a very important piece of their cultural identity. For the most part, being around people who share their cultural heritage was a fortifying source of cultural identity.

“Yeah, and for me personally, I never really was super involved with dancing and stuff growing up, until college, but I joined Polynesian Student Alliance and met other islanders that did do that, but definitely dancing is a way to engage with my culture.”

Participation in cultural advocacy activities through these clubs was described as both a significant source of cultural identity, as well as a way to present culture to others, a theme described further in the following section.

Theme 2: Representation of Cultural Identity

Due to the nature of the sampling protocol for this research study, all of the interviewees are part of a Cultural/International RSO on the University of Washington campus. Therefore, all of the participants are involved with an organized group based on their cultural identity, which coordinates activities and meets regularly. The purpose

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statement of the Hui Hoaloha 'Ulana (Hawai'i Club) reads, "To Unite the students who show exceptional interest in Hawai'i and its unique culture, and to promote the participation in social and other extracurricular activities."⁵ The purpose statement of the Polynesian Student Alliance reads, "Establish unity amongst those interested and respectful of the Polynesian culture, promote Polynesian cultural identity through traditions and customs, and outreach and recruit high school students, self-determination, respect, and representation."⁶

In discussion of cultural representation in general, three themes emerged in the data. All interviewees discussed a) self-representation activities in their community and on campus, b) the importance of education and spreading awareness, and c) the potential for museums to present culture through objects. Table 4 demonstrates several categories of responses under each of these emergent themes.

Emergent Themes	Response Categories
Self-Representation Activities	Community, Campus, RSO
Education & Spreading Awareness	Build Community, High School outreach, outsider awareness
Museums and Objects	Raises awareness, objects still used, contemporary styles of objects? Sufficient context for objects?

Table 4: Representation of Culture Emergent Themes and Categories of Responses

A) Self-Representation in Community and on Campus

⁵ University of Washington Student Activities Office, "RSO Directory." Accessed June, 2014 <http://depts.washington.edu/sao/rso-directory/?club=302>

⁶ University of Washington Student Activities Office, "RSO Directory." Accessed June, 2014 <http://depts.washington.edu/sao/rso-directory/?club=271>

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All interview participants highlighted their activities with members of their RSOs, and how they are already representing their culture separate from the museum exhibit. Interview participants highlighted both the value of engaging with individuals who share cultural heritage to form a community, and the ability to learn from one another within that community, and share cultural experiences and knowledge. One interviewee discussed the fact that she had not been very interested in traditional dance until she came to the University of Washington. Her peers in Polynesian Student Alliance and the ability to learn traditional song and dance through members from her community, that were her own age, allowed her to explore her cultural identity more. Additionally, one interviewee discussed the values of learning from one another through the RSOs. He noted that growing up on the main land, there were aspects of his culture that he was able to learn from his peers through practicing for organized events, in ways he was not already exposed to. He also discussed RSOs as a means of creating a sense of community amidst a large college campus.

"Things like cultural practices like dancing, like we teach each other, because a lot of us don't know a whole lot about our culture because we grew up on the main land and a lot of us are trying to find that... But one thing that is great about that though is that we are practicing every day of the week, aspects of these different island cultures and so we get to learn about our own culture, with people who are of that culture, who know the culture, and are teaching us, and we get to learn about each others' culture. Because the Pacific is such a vast and diverse place, you know. And so not everyone has the same culture...We look out for each other and that is one aspect of our culture is that we are so community based. And we look out for each other and we act like each others brothers and sisters, which is weird you know because we all came into this university not knowing each other."

B) Education and Spreading Awareness

All of the interviewees discussed participating in and organizing activities for members of these clubs, as well as for the public, which are intended to raise awareness

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and educate others about their cultures. One interviewee discussed the need to promote their culture:

“Everything’s not sacred ... I think it’s really important to educate others because how are we [not] going to be stuck in the background if we don’t go out there and share our knowledge with people?”

Polynesian Student Alliance puts on an event, referred to as Poly Day. Poly Day was described as an outreach event for high school students in the area, other members of the Polynesian community of Seattle, and the general public. It includes workshops in the morning, geared more towards Polynesian high school students in the area, as an effort to encourage them to practice traditional customs, learn their meanings, as well as show them the University Campus and the strong Polynesian student presence. These workshops are followed by performances and festivities on Red Square, a large, open courtyard on campus, which is open to the general public. Two out of the six interview participants discussed instances of their cultural traditions, such as song and dance, being perceived as merely entertainment. That is the significance of the workshops prior to the performances, is to teach what different dances and songs mean. However, if people don’t come to the workshops, they lose that additional context, and the performances come off as entertainment. Furthermore, Hawaii club hosts an annual Luau, which is open to the public, and features Hawaiian food, and performances. Micronesian Night is an event hosted by the Micronesian Islands Club, and in the past in collaboration with the sister organization, Marianas TaoTao Tano Club of Seattle University. These events all promote and celebrate the cultures of the Pacific, educating outsiders, and strengthening the community.

These student organizations offer varying degrees of openness and public engagement. For example, all four members of the Polynesian Student Alliance discussed

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the openness of the club, and their efforts to encourage others to join. Additionally, they teach others how to participate in various cultural activities, and get them to try it themselves.

“PSA definitely tries to make sure we’re open, and friendly to everybody, and let everyone know that we love to like, we just love culture, and we love to be have people aware of who we are ... During Poly Day, in between performances, [we were] actually getting the audience to participate. One was, who could do this, its called a *fa'aumu* and its just this loud yell, like if you say ‘CHEEHU’ really loud. That’s another cultural tradition.”

All of the interview participants emphasized the importance of first hand experience in learning about culture. Other interview participants who were involved with Poly Day listed blowing into a conch shell, and learning dances as other activities they got the audience to participate in. All of the interview participants emphasized the importance of first hand experience in learning about culture, which is discussed further later in this paper.

Furthermore, one interviewee highlighted another way she engages the community through sharing her culture. She discussed her involvement with a different exhibit, the *No Longer Invisible: Asian and American Pacific Islander Voices* display at the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center at the University of Washington.⁷ Through the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, students have the opportunity to submit a short story about what their heritage means to them. These stories are posted online, and culminate in an exhibit at the cultural center.

C) Representation of Culture through Objects in the Museum

⁷ University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs, “No Longer Invisible: Asian American & Pacific Islander Voices.” Accessed June, 2014 <http://www.washington.edu/omad/no-longer-invisible/>

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Participants were asked for their opinions on whether objects could be representative of active culture, if they were part of the museum’s collection. Again, each participant offered a unique opinion on the matter, and may have interpreted the question differently, but trends can be identified among the responses. Some participants responded to the question as if it were asking whether or not culture can be represented by dioramas or objects. In an example of this kind of response, the respondent cited the Korean wedding portion of *Pacific Voices*, noting that, “like the Korean Wedding in there, its like that was a really good visual representation of what that culture actually does.... I’ve seen that kind of costume or regalia.” She made the connection between what was displayed in the exhibit, to what she had seen elsewhere. However, she had not indicated a personal connection to Korean culture, and admitted that she had drawn her conclusion based on ‘outsider’ experiences.

Other participants understood the questions closer to how they were intended, regarding whether or not objects that are removed from their original cultural context, through acquisition by the museum, can be representative of contemporary forms of culture. Table 5 demonstrates the range of responses, with descriptive quotations.

Can Objects in a Museum be Representative of Active Cultures?		
Yes	Objects like these are still used	"I think it still is part of the culture because it obviously is, I mean there’s certain items that I know that are in the exhibit for the Samoan, [that] are still being used today. There’s a Kava bowl, and that’s still an active part of what we, like I did a Kava session before our little ceremony just last week for Poly Day."
	Raises Awareness (see previous section)	"we still use all the artifacts that were shown inside, yeah I don’t think it takes away from our culture since its in the museum I think it just raises more awareness of what we do."
Maybe	Depends on how the museum	"I think it depends on how it was retrieved, like maybe if they asked for it be taken as like an artifact, then I think that that’s

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	acquired objects, if acquired immorally, tells different story	okay for the purpose of showing others what its like, so yeah, I don't find anything wrong with that," She noted, however, that if the museum had stolen the objects, then that represents a very different story.
No	Ownership- can't own culture	"If you're saying that another group of people owns your stuff it's kind of like, what do you mean? What are you talking about, that's part of my culture. And so I think [other] people sometimes need to be more careful about their words and how they place them." I feel like if an "outsider group" is owning these indigenous artifacts and indigenous pieces of culture, it does kind of create like a negative vibe almost"
	Static Representation	"in the Samoan segment, like you'll see the kava bowl, the <i>tanoa</i> . But it almost looks like, for me, like if I was someone outside of the culture, I would think 'oh this is what they did back in the day, that's really cool.' But like a lot of people don't really understand that people still do that, and use the actual bowl. Or a plastic bowl these days (laughs)"

Table 5: Representation of Culture through Objects in Museum

The final observation in Table 5 connects to a response from a Hawaiian advisor during the opening of the exhibit described in Miriam Kahn's article from 2000, *Not Really Pacific Voices*. He had asked why they had included a Rubbermaid Laundry Basket in the Northwest Coast Potlatch display, and she notes that she simply responded (as it was during the opening celebrations) that it was illustrative of the contemporary character of potlatches. In actuality, they had wanted a traditional box, but could not acquire one in time for the exhibit opening. In her discussion, Kahn cites the wide use of plastic laundry baskets in museum exhibits centered on potlatches, and the strong reactions elicited from that curatorial choice. In a footnote she cites, "'the plastic laundry baskets used in contemporary potlatches as both gifts and containers for gifts to high-ranking guests are particularly surprising [for museum visitors]' (Laforet 1993:27). Yet, as Gloria Webster has said, 'If the

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culture's alive it goes from bent boxes to laundry baskets. It just kind of flows along' (Laforet 1993:27)." The fact that a participant in this study discussed the contemporary use of a plastic bowl for his kava ceremonies, among other cultural adaptations, is very interesting. He still identified with the traditional wooden tanoa bowl in the exhibit, although he generally utilizes a plastic one. Furthermore, the plastic laundry basket remains in the Potlatch section of *Pacific Voices*. Specific relevance to *Pacific Voices* is examined further in the following section.

Theme 3: Relevance of Pacific Voices

Interview participants were asked several questions centered on the relevance of *Pacific Voices* to their own cultural identity and experiences. Four central themes emerged from the interview data, highlighting a) resonance of themes, content, and objects presented in the exhibit, b) interviewees' experience with reflection/connection to personal experiences while in the exhibit, c) impact of awareness of the collaborative nature of the exhibit's development, and d) use of the exhibit, or interest in hypothetical involvement in a similar one. All data under these sub-themes, as well as data included earlier in the analysis touched on the importance of first-hand experience in learning about culture, which is discussed further at the end of this section. Table 6 demonstrates these emergent themes and response categories from the interview data.

Emergent Themes	Response Categories
A) Resonance of Themes, Content, and Objects	Perceived overall message, Culture inclusion, Sources of cultural identity outlined, Objects displayed
B) Reflection/Connection to Personal Experience	Similarities & Differences, Family connections
C) Impact of Awareness of Collaborative Design Model	Awareness, Appreciation, Responsibility, Authenticity, Ambivalence

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D) Use of Pacific Voices/Interest in Hypothetical Participation in Similar Model	Awareness of exhibit, Previous visit, Recommendation, Interest in participating in hypothetical similar model
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Table 6: Relevance of *Pacific Voices* Emergent Themes and Categories of Responses

A) Relevance of Themes, Content, and Objects

Three of the six interview participants had visited *Pacific Voices* previously. All three had visited for a class, had not known about the exhibit before their class visit, and had not returned since. Participants who had not visited *Pacific Voices* previously, were unaware of the exhibit. When asked whether they were likely to recommend *Pacific Voices* to someone looking to learn more about Pacific Rim culture, one interview participant indicated that they would recommend the exhibit. One interview participant said that they would recommend it only if the hypothetical person seeking to learn had tried to contact members of those cultures first. The other three interview participants said they would not recommend the exhibit. Reasons given for not recommending *Pacific Voices* included their feeling that there may be a lack of authenticity, out of respect for members of that culture, and their own perceived impact of learning from people, first hand, rather than in a museum setting. These themes will be discussed more in depth later in this paper.

Participants were asked what they believed the overall message of *Pacific Voices* was. All six of the participants indicated that they thought the exhibit intended to display the diversity of cultures from the Pacific, while identifying key similarities among them. Interestingly, three of the six participants mentioned that they were surprised that the exhibit included cultures from all around the Pacific Rim, notably the Asian and North American cultures. Given the title of the exhibit, they had associated the “Pacific” with their

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more familiar Pacific Islander cultures from Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

However, all participants displayed a positive reaction to their interpretation of the overall message of the exhibit.

In regard to the particular objects and themes selected for the exhibit, all interviewees demonstrated a generally positive reaction. All felt that the objects selected were common or well-known for those cultures, and were appropriate. One interviewee mentioned that she would have included in the Hawaii section more description of the water culture (surfing, sailing) and described uniqueness of the hierarchy system in the cultural heritage. Furthermore, two interviewees discussed including more objects to illustrate daily activities of the Polynesian cultures, including traditional food preparation, clothing and houses. Although all participants supported the material culture in the exhibit, five out of six interviewees discussed the feeling that there seemed to be a lack of contextual support for the objects. For example, one interviewee discussed the need for explanation of the meaning of the kava bowl within ceremonies:

"Everything was just presented like there was the item, and it told you first what it is, like an English description of what it is, and then in italics and smaller words it told you like what the name is in that culture's language. And then it didn't really give a description of what it means within the context of the ceremonies... Because for me, it would just be nice to go beyond just naming what the item means, but what it means within the ceremony."

Three interviewees mentioned feeling like their cultural heritage was missing from the exhibit, which lead them to reflect on their cultural identity. These interviewees found similarities between their own cultural practice in presentations of other cultures within the exhibit, and drew meaning from that. One interviewee said,

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“when I didn’t see my Tongan culture really represented ... all I could relate to was just the kava ceremonies and the chief system [from the Samoan Saofa’i section], and I feel like Tongans have a really complex and meaningful chief system as well, so I feel like that could be displayed in the museum as well.”

Similarly, two interviewees of Tongan heritage explained how aspects portrayed as Samoan tradition, are also of the Tongan tradition. For example, in the Samoan section, the kava ceremony is highlighted, while the kava (‘ava) ceremony in Tongan culture is practiced differently, and carries somewhat different meaning than in Samoan culture. Only the Samoan tradition depicted within *Pacific Voices*, but interviewee participants with Tongan heritage identified with this aspect of the exhibit.

“its much more casual with the Tongan community... for Tongans its very normal to hear about kalapus which directly translates into club. And in these kalapus, the members are all men from the community, like pastors, uncles, fathers, brothers, they all go to that and its usually Friday nights, and they just drink kava all night, and its super casual. We have our sacred ceremonies too for when they do it at funerals or weddings too, but with Tongans its so casual. Like I remember growing up my dad would be like oh I’m going to hang out with they guys, you know like that’s how it was. All the times I hear about kava ceremony, I think about my dad.”

B) Reflection/ Connection to Cultural Experience

All 6 interviewees discussed reflecting on their own cultural identity and experience while in the exhibit. For some interviewees, specific objects or images within the exhibit resonated with their past experiences directly. One interviewee said, “I was pleasantly surprised, like for the Obon, I [thought] of the dances we had to do or the costumes that we had to wear (laughing), and I was like, ‘oh god!’ but it was fun to think about.” While some interviewees discussed focusing on similarities between what was presented, others

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focused on differences, and said that they connected to the diversity presented in the exhibit.

“I just pointed out the similarities, like oh yeah I’ve seen that before, and my mom has this, or, that looks like my uncle ... But even in the ones that aren’t similar, like there were still some similar[ities], like I would read some of the descriptions, like the Vietnamese one was talking about respect... and I was like oh that’s important in our culture too. My parents like grounded that in my head.”

As noted earlier, three interview participants discussed the value of respect in their culture, and they recalled connecting to multiple aspects of *Pacific Voices*, from various cultural displays, which emphasized the value of respect.

C) Impact of Awareness of Collaborative Design Model

Participants were also asked to what degree they were aware that community advisors collaborated in developing the content of each cultural display within the exhibit. All participants had some idea of this, but with varying reasons for knowing. When asked if knowledge of this collaborative aspect changed their reaction to the exhibit, the responses were widely varied and included commentary about aspects of appreciation, responsibility, and authenticity. Table 7 shows key quotations from the responses to these questions.

Effect:	Example of Reaction to Collaborative Aspect
Appreciation	“one of them I was like ‘Oh this came from the hālau,’ so it was like oh they actually went to a traditional hula school for those instruments, like that’s really cool... it made me appreciative of the work they put into it because it could be really easy to just be like, oh I found this and then look it up on the Internet.”

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	"Just knowing that [advisors] were part of the planning brought a little bit of peace."
Responsibility	"Yeah I think its all about asking permission from the communities. And I do appreciate that the museum was willing to reach out and ask for that permission to, like hey can we use your culture to be displayed in our museum."
Authenticity	Affirming: "I think the fact that there was a name, it was confirmed, okay this is true because this is someone from my culture... So I just think that it makes it a lot more, like truer. Like I guess I trust the museum a little bit more I guess." Questioning: "I think if people got a sense that community people were consulted I think the person going through the exhibit would be like 'oh well this all must be right then,' you know? But I would still be weary because its not even the community people actually making the exhibit."

Table 7: Effects of Awareness of Collaborative Design

D) Value of Collaborative Method

Finally, interviewees were asked about the value of cultural exhibits in museums in comparison to activities their own organizations engage in, in regard to the effort to raise awareness and educate others about their culture. Participants were asked whether or not they personally would be interested in participating in a collaborative museum exhibit, as well as how they felt the ability to educate people about culture was more or less valuable in the museum or among community activities. Among the interview participants, there were mixed feelings about each model, and one interviewee discussed combining the two.

Table 8 shows data related to these two questions.

<i>Would you be interested in participating in a collaborative museum exhibit to display your culture, or do you value the efforts of organizations like your RSO more?</i>		
Interest/ Value?	Reasoning	Example Quote:
Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread awareness • Museums have wider reach 	"what if [people] never went to the events that we put on, so they think oh I'll learn about it at the museum or a workshop or at class. So I think both are just as valuable to one another."

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together with community and museum 	<p>“we know you just can’t yell and condemn what the museums are doing, you can help and assist them and be active in that whole process in general.”</p>
No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not qualified • Attend festivals instead, interact • Continue efforts with RSO- more freedom and authority • Engage at the community level 	<p>“I wouldn’t be as qualified [for museum exhibit], so in that sense my effort is better put into luau ... it’s the way that I can help the most.”</p> <p>“without interaction ... they are not really getting the whole picture. And they need to keep that in mind... its good to keep going to these festivals, or if they have community events where you can actually engage.”</p> <p>"Something that our organizations do differently than museums is that we don’t have as much restrictions and everything, and its not so bureaucratic, and its not tied to money ... there's room for change in that because culture is always changing, its not static”</p> <p>“if you want to learn about someone’s culture, you know, no offense, but you don’t go to a museum, you go directly to the source. And you learn from them.”</p>

Table 8: Interest in and Value of Collaborative Exhibit

Overarching Theme: Importance of First Hand Experience

Something that spanned all three themes was the importance of gaining first hand experience in learning about culture. All interview participants stressed the importance of first hand experience when learning about culture, and collectively felt that the activities and event facilitated by their RSOs offer, where museums generally do not. Several interview participants described the issue, even in the case of collaborative exhibits, of added layers of interpretation and translation between what the community describes about their culture, and what museum exhibit designers could conceptualize. He reasoned;

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“but I would still be weary because its not even the community people actually making the exhibit. The community is really just the ones talking to the person in charge of creating the exhibit, so then that person who’s creating the exhibit still will translate everything differently, no matter where they come from, what background they come from. Because especially if they’re not of that culture, then they’re not really going to really fully understand what the person they’re consulting with is really describing. And sometimes its because its too hard to describe it in just an interview, sometimes you have to actually go and see what’s being done and actually participate in it to actually even kind of get it.”

Furthermore, four of the six interviewees discussed the importance of being present for a kava ceremony in order to understand it. Noting that many people draw assumptions about the practice after watching YouTube videos, one interviewee maintained that many people make judgments without understanding the deep-rooted significance within the culture, which cannot be explained easily. One interviewee, who had grown up in Seattle, described an experience he had, learning more about his own culture from another student in Polynesian Student Alliance, who grew up in Samoa. The other student had tried to explain the *mana*, or spirit present during a kava ceremony or session. In realizing the near impossibility of defining spirit, the other student decided to invite the interviewee to participate first hand in a kava session;

“Because he kept talking about *mana* and spirituality, and when we talk about spirituality its one of those things you cant really just talk about it, and fully comprehend it you just have to practice it ... and so I really didn’t fully understand those concepts until he actually put me in the setting of the kava ceremony, he was like lets faikava right now, ... And that’s when I kinda fully understood what it is. It’s just the connection between you and the land, and I feel like a lot of people don’t understand that... like that relationship between you and the land, a relationship of trying to be responsible, and so a lot of people won’t understand that until they practice it.”

This interviewee who personally self-identifies with Samoan culture, discussed having to participate in the practice in order to grasp the subtle aspects involved.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Implications of the Findings

The participants in this study collectively indicated that the collaborative aspect of *Pacific Voices* did contribute to their perception of authenticity of the exhibit. However, interviewees did not place significant value in or demonstrate a significant interest in participating in a similar model for developing ethnographic content. Participants demonstrated mixed responses as to whether or not they personally would be interested in participating in a collaborative museum exhibit, as well as how they felt the ability to educate people about culture was more or less valuable in the museum or among community activities.

Some interviewees cited the ability for the museum to reach a broader audience, and therefore felt that cultural exhibits in museums are beneficial in spreading awareness to others. Furthermore, one interviewee discussed the value in cultural communities working together with museums, in order to help the museum produce authentic narratives. Interestingly, one interviewee thought she wouldn't be qualified to contribute to an exhibit about her own culture, and therefore felt her efforts were better spent in her RSO activities.

Two participants maintained that in order to learn about another culture, you have to go to the source. Therefore, they emphasized the need to participate in relevant activities and events in the community, and interact first hand with members of the community. This theme of first hand experience emerged as a recurrent theme spanning all of the interview data. Interview participants collectively felt that the significance of first

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hand experience, which they did not find in the collaboratively developed exhibit, is paramount to learning about culture. Even though the exhibit was collaboratively developed, interviewees cited the inherent added layers of interpretation in the exhibit content and their experience within the space. They all felt that the activities organized by their RSOs and other community based cultural groups offered more authentic, first hand experience, and therefore were better settings for educating others, and learning for themselves about their culture.

For example, four of the six interview participants discussed the importance of being present for a kava ceremony or session in order to understand it. Noting that many people draw assumptions about the practice after watching YouTube videos, one interviewee maintained that many people make judgments without understanding the deep-rooted significance within the culture, which cannot be explained easily. Another interviewee, who had grown up in Seattle but self identifies as Samoan, described an experience he had, learning more about his own culture from another student in Polynesian Student Alliance, who grew up in Samoa. The other student had tried to explain the *mana*, or spirit which is present during a kava ceremony or session. In realizing the near impossibility of defining spirit, the other student decided to invite the interviewee to participate first hand in a kava session. He felt that by participating in the ceremony himself, he was able to grasp meanings he couldn't understand previously.

From this exploratory study, it is clear that the product of collaboration, the exhibit, has been received by today's cultural community members with mixed feelings. The six interview participants stressed the value of first hand experience in cultural customs and experiences in order to understand them. Perhaps museums could focus on involving

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members of these communities throughout the public display of such exhibits, who can facilitate visceral experiences connected to the cultural content presented. Furthermore, all of the interviewees discussed the importance of connecting the content of cultural exhibitions in museum to present-day cultural and community organizations. Interviewees suggested adding messages to the exhibit about how to connect with these communities, in order for visitors to have the option to connect with people from these cultures, for increased first hand engagement.

Discussion

There is a great deal of field-wide discussion surrounding the value and importance of collaboration with communities on cultural exhibition content development and display in museums. However, there are many more questions to be investigated. These new models of curation and exploration have developed in part out of a response to academic critiques from the field of anthropology and cultural studies, in an effort to solve issues of representation, voice, inclusion, and authenticity in museums. But to what extent have collaborative processes fixed these issues?

The students interviewed for this study are participating in their own efforts to educate the wider public about their culture. If they do not completely value or trust the exhibition of culture in museums, is this role that museums have assumed still valid when it comes to ethnographic content? Furthermore, with a concept as nebulous as culture, it is impossible to represent every interpretation and perspective of culture. Is a long-term museum exhibition an appropriate venue for such a topic? As *Pacific Voices* seeks to present sources of cultural identity for several cultures, even within each cultural segment,

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metanarratives do not exist. Issues surrounding deciding what specifically to include in the exhibit has been discussed by curators of *Pacific Voices*, explaining that even within the group of advisors from each cultural group, it was difficult to pick out just one or two practices to present as sources of cultural identity for the whole group. This issue of cultural subjectivity is exacerbated by a generation gap. According to the students interviewed, they felt that changes in demographics, as well as evolution of traditional customs are not represented in the exhibit. These students discussed having different sources of cultural identity that were not demonstrated by the exhibit.

Connecting issues that Anthropology has brought to this discussion, recognition of increased cultural sovereignty and inclusion in museums, as well as tenets of new museology (especially social inclusion and access in museums), is a new phase for museums to enter. In order for the fundamental intentions of collaboration to reach communities, the public, and museum professionals, the perception of the museum still needs refreshing. Communities could have the expectation that they can come to the museum to tell their own story, not always the other way around. Museums can become seen as a place, a concept, a function through which communities can engage and share themselves.

This is not to say that museums as institutions become utterly benign and perspective-less. And I certainly do not mean to insist that all museums must adhere to these changes, and do everything in the same ways. However, as interview participants in this study have demonstrated, these communities are actively sharing their culture already. Museums should not necessarily expect that they have the ability to give communities

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voice; communities already have voice(s). What museums can do better is enable these groups to share in ways they can't on their own.

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Appendix

A) Text from recruitment email

Subject:

I want YOUR perspective on cultural representation in museums!

Body:

Hello [NAME],

My name is Emily, and I am a masters student in the UW's Museology Graduate Program. I am contacting you as an officer of [Name of RSO] to ask if you and members of your Registered Student Organization would be interested in participating in my thesis research. My thesis centers on questions of cultural representation in the museum setting, looking at an exhibit here on campus, *Pacific Voices* at The Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture, as a case study example. This exhibit centers on cultures from around the Pacific Rim that are represented in Seattle's present-day communities, including aspects of [specific cultural identity]. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may ask questions at any time.

Participation in the study would entail: A Guided Walk Through of the Exhibit and a Facilitated Group Discussion. The walk-through is unstructured, leaving participants to view, explore, and reflect on the themes of the exhibit for approximately 30 minutes. This is immediately followed by an individual interview, with open-ended questions. The interview should only take about 30 minutes, and will be audio recorded. Participation in this study would greatly benefit my research, and your feedback will also help inform how museums develop and portray cultural exhibits.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me directly. If any other members of your organization would be interested, please feel free to forward this information as you see fit. Anyone who wishes to participate can contact me directly. I will be scheduling these activities within the next few weeks.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Your perspectives are crucial to my research, Thank you!

Sincerely,
Emily Schmierer

B) Interview Prompts:

Research Questions:

- 1) How does community representation of cultural identity in the museum setting **resonate** with individual manifestation of cultural identity?

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- a. Do visitors who culturally identify with cultures represented in the exhibit associate with the sources of cultural identity defined by the community advisors in the exhibit?
 1. How do you define your cultural identity or identities? Did you have any cultural connection to any of the exhibits?
 2. What do you consider to be strong sources of your cultural identity?
 3. The exhibit outlines 3 main sources of cultural identity: 1) language and oral traditions, 2) ancestors, elders, and teachers; and 3) ceremonies. How do these sources resonate with your own sources of cultural identity?
 - b. What are the ways in which members of these cultural groups express or manifest their cultural identity in general?
 1. How do you express your cultural identity in general? (Food? Family? Music? Cultural centers/organizations? Religion?)
 2. How do organized cultural activities resonate with you, compared with daily rituals or activities?
 3. Would you be interested in being involved in developing an exhibit like this?
 4. How likely are you to recommend this exhibit to others who want to learn more about your culture or others? Why?
 - c. What are sources of identity that exist for visitors that were not addressed in the exhibit?
 - i. How do trends in identity shape material culture?
 1. How did you respond to the objects selected to illustrate cultural identity in the exhibit?
 2. What objects would you choose to represent how you shape your cultural identity?
 - ii. How do you represent yourself as an individual and as a member of a community?
 1. How do you conceptualize your individual identity within the collective identity of your culture?
 2. What activities do you engage in with other people who share your cultural identity?
 3. How do you share your cultural identity with others?
 4. When you consider your individual identity, to what extent does your cultural identity play a part?
- 2) To what extent can long-term ethnographic exhibits maintain **relevance** over time with visitors who are a part of the cultural groups being represented within the exhibit?
- a. To what extent is *Pacific Voices* relevant to the members of the represented communities as visitors today?

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1. What do you think was the overall message of the exhibit, Pacific Voices?
 - a. From what you saw in the space, were you aware that the cultural groups represented were consulted to develop this exhibit? Does this knowledge change your reaction to the exhibit?
 2. In your opinion, can objects in the exhibition be representative of active culture if they are part of a museum collection?
 - a. Why or why not?
 3. How does the display of culture add to your own conception of cultural identity in general? What about in this exhibit specifically?
- b. To what extent and in what ways do present-day members of the cultural communities represented in *Pacific Voices* actually use the exhibit?
1. Have you ever viewed the exhibit, *Pacific Voices* before today?
 - a. If you have, did you visit by yourself or with a group? What was the relationship of that group? (friends, family, peers, intergenerational?)
- c. How do visitors reflect on their own cultural identity as they experience the exhibit?
1. In what ways did you reflect on your own cultural identity as you experienced the exhibit?
 2. What did you think about specifically?
 3. Which aspects of the exhibit triggered this thought process?