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# An Intersectional Examination of the Portrayal of Native American Women in Wisconsin Museum Exhibits

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AN INTERSECTIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE PORTRAYAL OF NATIVE AMERICAN  
WOMEN IN WISCONSIN MUSEUM EXHIBITS

by

Erica Rodenbeck

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Master of Science

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## ABSTRACT

### AN INTERSECTIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE PORTRAYAL OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN IN WISCONSIN MUSEUM EXHIBITS

by

Erica Rodenbeck

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017  
Under the Supervision of Professor W. Warner Wood

This project examines how White curators at four museums in Wisconsin portray Native American women based on a number of institutional and individual curatorial choices. Intersectional Theory is used to explore how museums and museum professionals navigate questions of representation of a traditionally marginalized group. It places specific emphasis on the relationship between Community Curation and Intersectional Theory and explores whether or not the involvement of Native groups noticeably impacts representation of Native American women.

The study examines the exhibits of four museums: The Abel Public Museum, The New Canton College of Anthropology, The Pineville Public Museum, and The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History. These institutions vary in size, scope, audience, and curatorial strategies. However, they all have exhibits that depict Native Americans. Museum professionals from each institution were also interviewed to better understand how individual embodiments of particular Intersections of identity do or do not impact curatorial philosophies. In addition, the questions of

bias, authority, and perspective are also evaluated in conjunction with critical approaches to museology. Finally, it explores some of the ways in which these structures uphold existing frameworks of colonialism and White supremacy and how Intersectional museum exhibits can be developed to combat these paradigms and ensure more diverse and accurate representation.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

This project explores how a variety of internal and external influences impact the curation practices of particular institutions. It focuses on how museum professionals, specifically curators and exhibit designers, conceptualize the intersection between gender and Native American ethnicity in their work in museum exhibits. My research question was whether or not the level of Native American community involvement and input into exhibit design and development significantly influences how Native American women are represented. In addition to this, I interrogated whether or not the academic and personal background of these specific museum professionals appears to have had a meaningful impact on their curatorial decisions and conceptualizations of gender and ethnicity as these relate to exhibits about Native Americans and, more specifically, Native American women.

This study places particular emphasis on institutions with varying degrees of indigenous input into the exhibit design process and whether or not there is a perceptible difference in these Intersectional depictions based on level of community and indigenous involvement. It focuses closely on whether or not there is a correlation between indigenous interpretation/community involvement and the level of thoughtful interrogation and examination of these facets of identity. By conducting ethnographic interviews with museum professionals about how they conceptualize gender and ethnicity, I have explored how their perceptions operate in conjunction with, or in opposition to, the desires of community groups.

Intersectional theory in the context of previous anthropological scholarship implies that the practices of curation are intrinsically rooted in an androcentric and Eurocentric tradition. As

such, the curation practices of those trained in traditional methodologies is subject to several well-known biases. However, recent curatorial practices have focused on addressing these issues and encouraging ethnic minority and community groups to actively participate in the representation of their past and present ways of life. Given the diverse backgrounds of museum professionals, however, many have little or no formal anthropological training. As a result, their approach to questions about the representation of gender and ethnicity often differ based both on factors of identity and specific academic background.

The methodology employed in this project was informed by several significant literatures within anthropology. More specifically, Institutional Ethnography, and those ethnographies that focus on particular institutions are highly relevant. Dorothy E. Smith is often credited with developing the formal concept of Institutional Ethnography as a way of examining how people interact and relate to each other within the context of a broader institutional framework. For Smith, the site of ‘mundane’ activity becomes deeply relevant as a way of examining cultural interactions. Given that one of the other original goals of Institutional Ethnography is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of traditionally marginalized people, specifically women, within a given institution, this approach had deeply meaningful implications for this investigation. Smith’s 2005 publication *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* examines how women navigate particular social interactions and how these phenomena shape female experience. While Smith is predominantly concerned with institutions in a more abstract sense, such as the family or state, her assertion that “ruling institutions create forms of thought that structure how those who are societal members view themselves and the world they live in” (2005: xi) is highly relevant for more literal institutions as well—perhaps even especially museums.

There have been multiple ethnographic and scholarly studies involving museums. One of the most relevant to this particular project is Sharon Macdonald's *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum* (2002). This book focuses on the developmental history of an exhibit at the Science Museum in London, with the ultimate goal of "study[ing] the construction of science in museum exhibits" (2002:3). Additionally, it is exceptional in that it explores how museums create and uphold concepts of 'public culture' through several factors of exhibit design, such as object choice and curatorial strategies. She also explores how exhibits can be highly politicized and how visitors' preconceived notions may lead to interpretations that differ from the curators' intended message or messages. Macdonald also places museums and their exhibits as central to the construction of national identity and how a particular individual does or does not fit within that group (2002:217-244). Her exploration of appropriation by museums and their audiences is especially relevant to this project.

Another well-known example of ethnographic work in a museum context is *New History in an Old Museum* (Handler and Gable, 1997). This ethnography examines Colonial Williamsburg and its role in producing and reproducing particular cultural values. It discusses how traditional values of the museum often conflict with a more modern approach to issues of multivocality, especially in regards to traditionally disenfranchised groups. The representation of both women and African American slaves within Colonial Williamsburg is a highly contested issue that the ethnography examines in light of particular institutional values. While the focus of this particular ethnography is on the unique conflicts that arise between the educational and the commercial spheres of Colonial Williamsburg, the broader implications of these tensions can be experienced in all museums.

When considering Intersectionality in museums, the work of Intersectional theorists is also significant. Intersectional Theory is employed by a wide variety of fields, with both academic and popular cultural appeal. An interdisciplinary approach to the history and application of Intersectional Theory helps explain and critique the depiction of people who experience intersecting spheres of oppression based on several markers of identity. The representation of Native Americans in museums has been a contentious subject for decades, as has the representation of women in museums (Anderson and Winkworth 1991; Clifford 1997; Torreira 2016). However, one of the most crucial aspects of Intersectionality is that factors of identity interact in an integral way. This results in a unique phenomenon where Native American women face multiple spheres of oppression. First, they are Othered by historically Eurocentric curation practices that emphasize the experience of White settlers while treating Native American culture as a consumable object (Amanda Cobb 2005: 485-506; Jenkins 2009). Additionally, their experiences as women results in their partial erasure from history. Since museums, and Western culture as a whole, privileges male experience, this results in androcentric idealization (Bergsdóttir 2016; Machin 2008; Torreira 2016; among many other studies). The intersections of these factors of identity cannot be divided into discrete parts, however, and it is important to understand how both of these spheres of oppression work in tandem to downplay the unique and important contributions and experiences of Native American women.

The second chapter of this thesis (Intersectional Theory) explores several important aspects of Intersectionality. In addition to providing a working definition of Intersectional Theory, it discusses how the term was first conceptualized. It frames Intersectional Theory in its particular historical context and discusses how it has transitioned from a purely academic term to



a concept often used in activist circles and when discussing media. In conjunction with this, it also explores some of the ways in which Intersectionality has been applied to museum exhibits and curation in the past. Finally, it discusses some of the criticisms and limitations of Intersectional Theory, especially when utilizing it as a framework to encourage multivocality within museums and other institutions of learning.

The next chapter (Critical Museology and Community Curation) focuses on the use of critical museology and post colonial theory to explore representation in museum exhibits. It examines particular critiques of museums as Eurocentric and androcentric cultural centers, and how this has negatively impacted the depiction of both women and Native Americans. From there, it details some of the curatorial paradigms that have arisen in response to these issues of representation, with specific emphasis placed on community curation. First, it explains community curation as framed by the cultural nuances that necessitated it. Then, it provides examples of how community curation works Intersectionally to address these issues of representation. Finally, it provides some examples of how community curation has been applied to curation and exhibit development in the past.

The fourth chapter of this thesis (Site Descriptions) focuses on the institutions included in this analysis. Each institution is described in detail, with specific layouts of the exhibits dedicated to Native Americans provided and each institution situated within its particular community. The fifth chapter focuses on how museum professionals form the curatorial philosophies that shape institutional representation. How each museum professional conceptualizes identity and how this impacts their own views about exhibit design and development are discussed. Finally, how museum professionals view and utilize community curation are explored, especially when curating exhibits about communities that they do not

directly belong to. From there, I describe how race and gender are depicted within these exhibits. I focus on both physical representations, such as dioramas or drawings, and also on textual material, such as exhibit labels. Additionally, I examine community curation in these exhibits and whether or not there is any mention or indication of outside groups' involvement in curating them.

In Chapter 7 (Discussion), I examine several concepts that are central to museum professionals and their role in their respective institutions. First, I explore the concept of bias and how this can impact museum professionals' views about community curation and the Intersectional depiction of Native American women in museum exhibits. Then, I examine the concept of institutional and personal authority and how the construction of this authority works to provide specific institutional parameters that directly affect museum professionals' relationships with community curation and outside involvement in exhibit design. Finally, I discuss some of the implications that the issues of bias and authority have on museums and how these concepts can best be navigated to make museum exhibits more Intersectional.

## **Methods**

There are two distinctive portions to this project—observation of existing museum exhibits and interviewing museum professionals. Both are crucial to understanding how museums and their professionals engage in the curation of Native American women's voices, and, more broadly, curation as related to questions about identity. Since both institutional precedent and individual perspectives shape the development of particular exhibits, understanding both of these factors is necessary. Examining the complex interaction between museum professionals and the culture of a given museum helps to more closely interrogate how Intersectional Theory operates in varying institutions.

The first portion of this project, observation of existing museum exhibits, was conducted between February 2016 and April 2017. Examining the ways in which men and women are portrayed in existing exhibits helps more closely interrogate institutional and individual approaches to concepts like identity and changes to the division of labor through time. It also helps determine if there is a significant difference in the depiction of gender depending on the level of community involvement in curation. It should be noted that these methods are based on my observations and, as a result, subject to my biases. As a White heterosexual cisgendered woman, the ways in which I interpret particular curatorial choices are subject to my own Intersectional experiences. My conceptions of gender and ethnicity are thus unique and not universal. However, many people in Western cultures conceptualize gender as being a binary that is synonymous with a person's physical sex. My personal views on gender do not mirror this, but I approach this subject with the knowledge that a predominantly Western audience will likely have these particular preconceived notions with some variability based on age, educational attainment, and so on--younger and more highly educated people, for example, are generally more aware of the complexity of the relation between gender and biological sex (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Flores 2015; Ghisleni et al 2016). As my informants indicated, they believe that people in their audience associate particular traits with a male/female dichotomy. Three of the four museum professionals also acknowledged that they utilize markers like "presence or absence of secondary sexual characteristics" or "hair length" to indicate gender within the exhibits that they curated. Given the pervasiveness of this attitude among the museum professionals interviewed, for the purposes of this study it was therefore possible to determine the intended gender of a particular figure or character. In addition to particular visual depictions of individuals of specific genders, I also looked for exhibit labels that make mention of gender.

Although my observations showed that there were some exhibit labels that specifically mentioned gender roles to varying degrees, any mention of gender in an abstract or concrete sense was noted. When allowed, I took numerous photographs of exhibits. Field notes, including several notable visitor responses, were recorded concurrently in a notebook.

The second portion of the project focused on interviews with curators and other museum professionals about their personal histories as museum professionals and involvement in the exhibit development process. These interviews asked a number of open-ended questions about museum professionals' personal histories and involvement in the exhibit development process. These questions function in several important ways. First, they help to establish museum professionals' specific backgrounds and identities. Additionally, they provide history about the institution's exhibits depicting Native American women and establish whether or not a particular curator or museum professional was responsible for developing the existing exhibits. They also demonstrate how individual identity or academic background directly shape the ways in which Native American women are portrayed in an institution's exhibits. Finally, they may elucidate how previous exhibits were developed and whether or not Native groups were consulted. This portion of the project was conducted between November 2015 and February 2016. Participants were interviewed face-to-face, and I met with each of them in a quiet room at their respective institutions. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. I also took additional notes on-site and after each interview. Each person signed a consent form per IRB protocol, and was provided with additional documents to read over. While the risks associated with participation in this study are largely incidental, names of individuals, institutions, and associated towns or municipalities have been changed. This helped to ensure that participants could be speak more freely about potentially controversial topics like race, gender, and community curation. While

every effort was made to ensure that participants' identities' remained anonymous, it was necessary to include information about each institution's location, including population demographics. This was to provide insight into a particular museum's audience and how this might influence curatorial decisions. Participants were all museum professionals that I had worked with, in some capacity, in the past. As a result, I was able to contact them with relative ease via personal and professional networks. However, it was also my intention to focus on professionals at fairly diverse institutions. Factors such as museum size, scope, and audience influenced my decision to interview a specific person. This made it easier to see the connection between individual curatorial philosophies and institutional practices. Given my focus on how museums and museum professionals embody and uphold particular elements of White culture within particular exhibits, I chose to focus specifically on curators of White European heritage. This decision was significant because, as I will discuss later, this is the ethnic background of the vast majority of museum curators in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2: INTERSECTIONAL THEORY

### Introduction

The terms ‘Intersectional Theory’, ‘Intersectional Feminism’, and ‘Intersectionality’ all refer to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s initial concept that people inhabit multiple interacting spheres that shape and determine identity (1989). Cultural concepts such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status interact in diverse ways that inform a person’s experiences and shape their identities. In a society that has historically advantaged and disadvantaged certain people based on these and other factors, this is especially meaningful. Intersectional Theory asserts that the concerns of one group of people, for example, women, differ based on additional factors. Thus, the experiences of White women are different from the experiences of Women of Color because of the interacting spheres of oppression that Women of Color inhabit as both women and People of Color.

This chapter focuses on the history of Intersectional Theory, with specific emphasis placed on its origins and how it has become coopted by a variety of mainstream and non-academic sources. From there, discussion moves on to some of the critiques and limitations of Intersectional Theory, and how these concerns can be mitigated. When discussing an Intersectional analysis of gender roles as depicted in museum exhibits about Native Americans<sup>1</sup>, there are two especially important bodies of literature that are particularly relevant. The first of these deals with the development and emergence of Intersectionality and Intersectional Feminism as being a valid and essential way of examining questions of identity and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there is some debate regarding whether ‘Native American’ or ‘American Indian’ is the preferred term. However, I use ‘Native American’ throughout this project. This is both because there is currently no general consensus on which term is better, and because ‘American Indian’ and ‘Indian American’ are linguistically very similar, but refer to very different groups.

representation of a specific group. Additionally, literature that demonstrates an Intersectional approach to the concept of exhibit design is paramount to understanding these particular issues.

### **The Rise of Intersectional Theory**

Understanding the emergence of Intersectional Feminism and its role as an interpretive framework is crucial to examining its development and adoption by a wide range of academic disciplines. Although Intersectional Feminism examines multiple factors that influence identity, race and gender are two of the most studied. Intersectional feminism arose from several different schools of thought in response to various issues posed by people who were impacted by several spheres of oppression. The first discussions of what would later evolve into an Intersectional approach to Feminism are rooted in a little-known movement known as Multiracial Feminism. This feminist theory focuses on the lives and experiences of Women of Color. It questions the notion that gender identity plays the largest role in the identity formation and experiences of women, specifically for Women of Color (Thompson 2002:337). With the rise of feminism and multiple racial equality movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Women of Color saw a need to engage in political activism. However, they often found that neither racial nor gender-based advocacy groups adequately addressed their needs. Instead, these activists and scholars wanted to focus on structural inequality and how to address it as *both* women and people of color. One particularly notable and successful subdivision of Multiracial Feminism is Black Feminism. Several predominant Black Feminists are credited with developing the concept of Intersectionality, which was readily applied to Multiracial feminism when considering the experiences of Women of Color. One example of this is the 1996 article “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism”. Written by Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, this article discusses the nuanced perspectives and experiences of Women of Color. The focus of

their work, and Multiracial Feminism more generally, is on challenging “systems of domination, not merely as gendered subjects but as women whose lives are affected by [their] location in multiple hierarchies” (1996:321). The two further assert that there are several crucial elements of Multiracial feminism. First, they mention the importance of Intersectional theory or “a range of interlocking inequalities” (327) that shape the experience of Women of Color. Additionally, Multiracial feminism asserts that, “[c]lass, race, gender, and sexuality are components of both social structure and social interaction.[...]As a result, women and men throughout the social order experience different forms of privilege and subordination” (328). The authors also mention that there are overarching differences between women of different races. More specifically, they assert that the meanings and experiences of being a White woman in the United States are largely predicated upon the subjugation of Women of Color (328-329).

Multiracial feminism also examines the ways in which women assert and are denied agency in a given social setting. This includes an emphasis on how women, and particular Women of Color, have rebelled against oppressive institutions. Like many other feminist theories, Multiracial feminism is predicated upon a number of broad methodological approaches. For Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, there are three crucial principles of Multiracial feminism: “[b]uilding complex analyses, avoiding erasure, [and] specifying location” (Frankenberg and Mani (1988:306) quoted by Baca Zinn and Thornton Dil [1996:329]). This has allowed Women of Color to feel empowered by acknowledging their diverse experiences. By critiquing traditional gender and racial roles, Multiracial feminists have “asserted [themselves] as subjects [rather than merely objects]” (p. 329). Finally, Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill also focus on how Multiracial feminism brings together multiple forms of feminism that are based in particular racial identities. One of these is Black Feminism.



The field of Black Feminism became more formally recognized as a movement and as a kind of critical theory during the late 1980s and 1990s (Collins 1990). However, Black feminists and their contributions to the discussion of racial and gendered disenfranchisement date to over a century before that. In the United States, Maria Stewart is considered to be one of the first black feminists. Stewart was an orphan who worked as a domestic servant during her early life. She was eventually able to educate herself, despite her circumstances. Stewart first lectured in 1831 on issues such as slavery and androcentrism, both of which dramatically impacted Black women of the time period. She appealed to white men of the time noting, “[o]ur souls are fired with the same love of liberty and independence with which your souls are fired...[T]oo much of your blood flows in our veins, too much of your color in our skins, for us not to possess your spirits” (Stewart 1838:40). However, she also appealed to her Black female contemporaries. She urged Black women to “Sue for your rights and privileges. Know the reason you cannot attain them. Weary them with your importunities. You can but die if you make the attempt; and we shall certainly die if you do not (Ibid:38).” Stewart was also one of the first Black feminists in the United States to focus on the potential for Black female empowerment through a strong community of other Black women, especially Black mothers (Hill Collins 2002:2, Stewart 1989: 35).

Although Stewart’s work is notable in several ways, it shares a thematic consistency with other early Black feminists. Social and political activism and the importance of community are common elements found in Stewart’s writing and the writing of Black women like Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Anna Julia Cooper (Hill Collins 2002:3). While the Civil War ended slavery in the United States and gave Black people more access to education, poverty and segregation still prevented most from obtaining the same quality of life as White people.

While Civil Rights movements such as feminism and Black Power gained significant trajectory in more recent times, many Black women ultimately found themselves disillusioned with both communities. Mainstream feminism focused predominantly on the needs of middle class White women while ignoring the unique experiences of women of color. White feminists were sometimes willing to align themselves with Women of Color, but only insofar as it was relevant to their projects. Specifically, Women of Color were encouraged to focus on issues of gender equality, often at the expense of racial equality (Hill Collins 2002: 45-46) . Many White feminists argued that focusing on racial and gendered discrimination ultimately obfuscated the movement's mission. Adding insult to injury, many White feminists still suffered from the same racial bigotry as their misogynistic counterparts (Carby 1996: 61-86).

The Black Power and Civil Rights movements brought similar problems. While Black men slowly gained acceptance as academics and intellectuals with relevant opinions and experiences, Black women continued to find themselves marginalized. As Hill Collins mentions (2002: 4-8), The Black Panther Movement—and other Black activist organizations—still suffered from androcentrism and rampant sexism. Many Black women felt that these organizations did not fully acknowledge their problems as Women of Color with intersecting spheres of oppression.

One of the most influential scholars in this sphere is Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Crenshaw is a law professor at University of California Los Angeles and Columbia Law School. She has written extensively on Black feminism, specifically on the unique struggle that Black women face when dealing with the legal system. Crenshaw is credited with first formally adopting the term 'intersectionality' in 1989 when discussing how Black women are oppressed by the legal system. Crenshaw argues that it is insufficient to examine race and gender

separately, as anti-discrimination law and other legal statutes often do. Since Women of Color are impacted by both gender and racial discrimination, Crenshaw argues that the law ultimately fails women of color because it does not consider how to handle groups that are the simultaneous victim of multiple forms of oppression and discrimination based on their identities (Ibid).

Crenshaw has gone on to apply her concepts of intersectionality to Critical Race Theory and to a myriad of social issues (1989; 2007; 2010). Along with other academics, she has worked to solidify the definition of Critical Race Theory. Her work has been used in a variety of legal settings, such as in developing legislation on race and gender discrimination for the United Nations and in the constitution of South Africa.

Another key contributor to Black feminism and its role in intersectional theory is Patricia Hill Collins. Collins is one of the foremost scholars of Black feminism and its relationship to Intersectionality. Her seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2002) details the contributions of significant Black female scholars such as Maria Stewart, Alice Walker, and Angela Davis. Drawing heavily on Crenshaw's previous discussion of Intersectionality, Collins stresses three central themes. First, Collins argues that an Intersectional approach is the only true way to understand the spheres of oppression that mutually subjugate Black women. Additionally, she discusses how these unique histories have resulted in a continuous need for social justice and reappropriation—of both racial and gendered phenomena. Finally, she discusses how the experiences of Black women and the tenets of Intersectional Black feminism can be broadly applied to Intersectional forms of oppression that other groups face. Collins has also written extensively on how Intersectional theory can best be applied to a wide variety of topics. Her 1998 publication, *Black Women and the Search for Justice* centers on the concept of justice and how it applies to the intersecting

spheres of oppression that Black women face. She writes about the ways in which Black women are sexually exploited and Black bodies are objectified in *Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2005). From *Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (2006) focuses on nationalism as an ideology and how this conflicts with or complements both Black identity and feminism. In 2009, Collins published *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, the Media, Schools, and Democratic Possibilities*, which examines the intersection between socioeconomic class and race and how this can be seen in schools across the country. That same year, she wrote “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” for *Hypatia*. This article reflects on much of her previous work on Intersectionality and how the representation of so-called ‘family values’ “[function] as a privileged exemplar of intersectionality in the United States” (62) by constructing and reproducing specific and normative roles and structures.

Intersectionality has also gained recent trajectory in less academic settings. A GoogleBooks Ngram graph (Figure 2.1) demonstrates that the term Intersectionality/intersectionality has had a significant increase in usage in the past several decades. This graph examines the occurrence of particular words or phrases in published texts over time. Prior to 1970, ‘Intersectionality’ does not appear in the corpus of English literature. While it does begin to emerge in 1971, its presence is negligible until 1986. At this point, the term’s usage rises exponentially from an instance of 0.0000000903% to 0.0000048683% in 2000. At this point, the graph begins to display steep linear growth until 2008, where it reaches an occurrence of 0.0000085948% (GoogleBooks). As Ngram does not currently display data from after 2008, it is difficult to determine how the term’s usage will change, but trends in other areas seem to indicate a general increase.

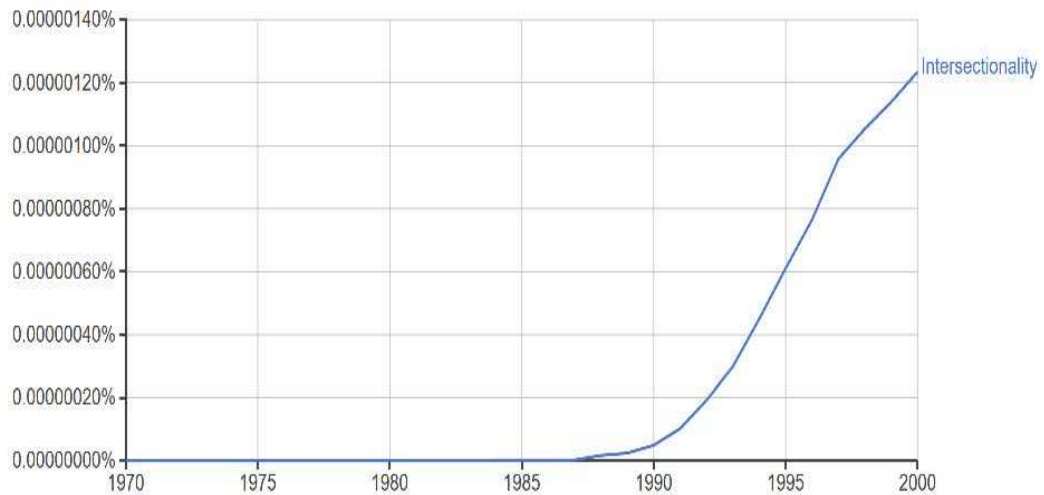


Figure 2.1. GoogleBooks Ngram graph demonstrating the number of times the word ‘Intersectionality’ appears in published work from 1970 to 2000.

While feminist and gender-focused critiques have become more prevalent in a variety of academic disciplines, the data indicate that the adoption of Intersectional theory is a very recent phenomenon. However, its applicability to several fields is noteworthy. While an Intersectional approach is most typically utilized in the humanities and social sciences, it has clear and obvious relevance to any field dealing with representation and identity within a diverse population.

### **Native Americans and Intersectional Theory**

As previously discussed, the vast majority of scholars who first championed the application of Intersectional Theory to a variety of questions were Black women. However, Intersectionality has been utilized to explore complex issues that directly impact people who embody diverse intersections of oppression. As Hancock has argued:

Case studies chronicling or comparing the political experiences of Black, Latino, Native American, or Asian American women of different class, sexual orientation, or national origin have generated critically important knowledge essential for testing time-worn theories such as the gender gap, pluralist models of democracy, approaches to peacemaking, sustainable development, and international law on refugees (2007:66).

Even before Crenshaw introduced Intersectional Theory in 1989, Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine had edited and compiled a volume of essays called *The Hidden Half, Studies of Plains Indian Women*. Published in 1983, this collection features revolutionary essays about the presumed role of Native American Plains women in prehistory and the early phase of European contact. The case studies incorporated scholarship from anthropology and indigenous studies to explore some of the ways in which Native women have historically been ignored or marginalized in previous research. Beatrice Medicine, a member of the Lakota Sioux, wrote an essay entitled “ ‘Warrior Women’—Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women”. In this piece, Medicine explored the sex roles of women, specially emphasizing how gendered behaviors that did not correspond with Western conceptualizations of feminine gender roles were “not[...]a form or deviant and idiosyncratic behavior, but [...] a healthy and self-actualized role” (Medicine 1983:275). Medicine then goes on to discuss the degree to which Plains women were able to navigate both masculine and feminine spheres in socially acceptable contexts (Ibid:280-283; Whitehead 1983:90-93). She also directed a documentary about the appropriation of Plains culture by a group of Russians (Medicine 1999), and she wrote a book exploring the difficulty in navigating her identity as an anthropologist and an indigenous person (Medicine 2001). This publication, entitled *Learning to Be an Anthropologist & Remaining Native: Selected Writings*, explores several of Medicine’s experiences as a Native American woman working as an anthropologist. It explores several different aspects of gender identity and their implications for Medicine personally, and for Indigenous Women more broadly (Ibid: 114). Medicine passed away in 2005, but her revolutionary examination of the experiences of those who embody multiple spheres of oppression has left a significant mark on subsequent scholars.

In the case of Native American women, there are several other significant Intersectional scholars and activists who focus on a variety of issues. One of these is Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Simpson is a member of the Mississauga-Nishnaabeg subtribe of the Anishinaabe and works as a writer and activist. Her work focuses on a variety of issues impacting First Nations People, however, she is best known for her involvement with indigenous land rights activism. Her 2014 paper “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation” is a provocative piece that explores the connection between indigenous knowledge systems and ancestral land. Simpson begins her piece with a folktale about a girl named Kwezens who discovers how to tap the trees for maple syrup (2014:2-5). Simpson outlines how this story functions as a particular example of Nishnaabeg “Theory” (Ibid:7). She outlines some of the particular nuances of Nishnaabeg “Theory”, ultimately concluding that:

Most importantly, “theory” isn’t just for academics; it’s for everyone [...] “Theory” within this context is generated from the ground up and its power stems from its living resonance within individuals and collectives [...] This is how our old people teach. They are our geniuses because they know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we’re all better when we’re able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves (Simpson 2013:3-7; Doerfler et al. 2013:xv-xvii, quoted in Simpson 2013: 7-8).

While Simpson’s initial critique of what she calls “settler colonial” pedagogy (Ibid: 19) refers specifically to Western institutions of higher learning and the knowledge systems and pedagogies that they perpetuate, it can also be readily applied to museums and other institutions of informal learning. Further, Simpson’s emphasis on an epistemological framework that is “generated from the ground up” (Ibid) directly echoes the core concepts of Intersectional Theory’s approach to inclusivity.

Simpson’s most recent publication, entitled *As We Have Always Done*, will be released in October 2017. Like “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious

transformation”, this publication focuses how Indigenous knowledge systems can be used in resistance movements as ways of decolonizing Indigenous experiences. Simpson’s work also extends to other social justice issues. In April 2017, an article on BitchMedia included a quote from Simpson about gender violence where she states:

I think it’s in all of our best interests to take on gender violence as a core resurgence project, a core decolonization project, a core of any Indigenous mobilization... This begins for me by looking at how gender is conceptualized and actualized within Indigenous thought because it is colonialism that has imposed an artificial gender binary in my nation (Ibid:Np).

This demonstrates Simpson’s Intersectional approach to complex issues of gender, colonialization, and violence. Although Simpson has a PhD from the University of Manitoba, and has taught in several prestigious universities, much of her work has been as “an independent scholar using Nishnaabeg intellectual practices” ([leannesimpson.ca/about:Np](http://leannesimpson.ca/about:Np)).

Another Native American scholar who focuses on Intersectional Theory in her work is Mishuana Goeman. Goeman is a member of the Tonawada Seneca who works at UCLA as a professor in the Gender Studies and American Indian Studies departments. In 2007, she coauthored a chapter in *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity through Education* entitled “Achieving Gender Equity for Native Americans” (Calhoun, Goeman, and Tsethlikai 2007:525-552). As the title suggests, this chapter is an examination of how Native Americans can best achieve gender equity in an educational context. In 2008, Goeman wrote an article for *American Quarterly* entitled “(Re)Mapping Indigeneous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature”. This piece focuses on Native women’s “methods of negotiating their gendered and racialized locations within the constraints of dominant discourses” (2008:296). Her ultimate conclusion is that Native feminist conceptualizations of space are highly contingent upon their particular racial and gendered perspectives and that in order to achieve equity in a variety of



settings, such as workplaces or schools, these perspectives need to be considered (Ibid:300-301). Her more recent work also focuses on the relationship between Native identity, feminism, and spatial practices (2009; 2013).

Another relevant study that focuses on the role of women in Native American societies is “Farmers, Traders, Warriors: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women” by P.K. Buffalohead (1983:236-244). In this publication, Buffalohead explores how the important role of Native American women has often been ignored or simplified by historians and other scholars (Ibid:236-238). While the Ojibway people did have fairly clear divisions of labor in many circumstances, Buffalohead argues that “men and women worked side by side in mutually dependent roles” (Ibid:238). This acts in direct contrast to the assertion of Christian missionaries’ accounts of the tribe which stated that women were “burden bearers, drudges, and virtual slaves to men” (Ibid: 237). While Buffalohead does acknowledge that Ojibway women were responsible for a large amount of everyday tasks, such as planting corn, making clothing, and raising children, she also argues that their contributions were valued in a way that was not true for European women of the same time period (Ibid:236-240). Buffalohead also demonstrates, through the analysis of diaries, newspaper articles, and government documentation, how White missionaries and explorers made particular assumptions about the role of Ojibway women and how those assumptions were often wrong (Ibid:239-240).

### **Intersectionality in Anthropology and Museums**

Although Intersectional Theory was originally applied particularly in academic circles associated with the United States, it has spread internationally and is especially commonly invoked in Europe. The 2012 publication *To Tender Gender: The Past and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology* was originally published in Stockholm, Sweden. This volume contains

several essays about the current status of gender research in the fields of archaeology and anthropology. While the publication does not specifically focus on Intersectionality, there are several essays that relate directly to it. First is Thedéen's essay "Box Brooches beyond the Border. Female Viking Age Identities of Intersectionality". Perhaps the most relevant essay in this particular text is Annika Bünz's "Is It Enough to Make the Main Characters Female? An Intersectional and Social Semiotic Reading of the Exhibition *Prehistories I* at the National Historical Museum in Stockholm, Sweden". Finally, the publication ends with "Facing Gender. Corporeality, Materiality, Intersectionality, and Resurrection" by Fredrik Fahlander. All of these authors are associated with Stockholm University or Göteborg University--two of Sweden's largest and most prestigious universities.

The first of these essays focuses on Viking era box brooches and their connection with identity. The approximately 800 brooches found are generally assumed to have some connection with female gender, especially those from the Gotland region (Thedéen 2012:61). Thedéen's analysis centers on an Intersectional approach to Viking-Age identity based on these objects. While previous analysis has focused on the concepts of ethnic identities and social statuses, her project is unique in that it utilizes an Intersectional examination of gender, ethnicity, social status, and other markers to derive meaning about identity from these objects (Ibid:62-63).

One of the most compelling suggestions that Thedéen makes is that it is possible that "females can be ascribed more complex and varied roles and identities than previously possible" (Ibid 63). Her analysis also postulates that there may have been multiple femininities in Viking societies. She examines the grave goods of varying sites, which often included scales and weights used in trade. This stands in contrast to the perceived role of prehistoric Scandinavian women as primarily mothers or healers, which have been traditionally accepted as the most

appropriate roles for women. Thedéen goes on to discuss how this intersection of feminine social roles is further convoluted when considering regional identity. In particular, “Scandinavian Viking Age female dress, in contrast to the more international male dress and attributes, had such a distinct character. The female dress signaled regional identity, and furthermore dress ornaments have been assumed to be closely connected to individual identity and ethnicity” (Ibid 64).

Thedéen is particularly interested in the intersection of gender and identity in these instances. She ultimately concludes that, “[o]ne inference from the study is that ethnicity appears to be negotiable, both in terms of the fact that objects from various cultures can be combined and secondly that they are given new contexts in relation to the dress and body” (Ibid 78).

Annika Bünz’s essay focused on the National Historical Museum in Stockholm, Sweden and applies Intersectional Theory to an analysis of the portrayal of specific characters in the exhibit *Prehistory 1* at the National Historical Museum in Stockholm. She focuses on the concept that “women to a greater extent than previously are included in the narratives of the exhibition” (2012:97). Despite this emphasis on numbers, however, Bünz feels that there have not been enough advances made towards a more Intersectional portrayal of women (Ibid). She discusses how narratives of progress are utilized in anthropological and historical museums, emphasizing the development of culture throughout time. This directly relates to assertions by Haraway and others that museum exhibits demonstrate a particular kind of antiquated analogous thinking that equates women with nature and men with culture (1986:53; Bünz 2012). The use of this “male is to culture as female is to nature” trope in conjunction with the progressive narrative of many museum exhibits, and an androcentric cultural framework, results in a narrative where “the [W]hite Western man, physically and symbolically, heads the evolution from nature (woman) to culture (man)” (Bünz 2012:97). This echoes Ortner’s articulation that:

the pan-cultural devaluation of woman could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that woman is being identified with, or symbolically associated with, nature, as opposed to man, who is identified with culture. Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate, not to say oppress, her (1972: 11-12).

While Bünz observes that women are now portrayed in greater numbers in museum exhibits than in the past, the ways in which they are portrayed is largely the same and dependent upon this particular construction of gendered identity.

Bünz's approach centers on a social semiotic and Intersectional approach to examining this exhibit. She uses Intersectionality "to problemati[z]e and make visible how relations of power are created within, between, and across categories such as race, class, and gender" (Bünz 2012:99). She further articulates how Intersectionality explains the issue of representation in museum exhibits as well as how its application can result in a more nuanced understanding of how museums as institutions construct and uphold existing archetypes of identity in both past and present (Bünz 2012:99-100). In the exhibits, Bünz observes that male figures still outnumber female figures at a ratio of approximately 2:1 (2012:101). However, she also acknowledges that women and, in particular, middle-aged women, are generally well-represented. Bünz is especially interested in the Intersection of age and gender, so she examines how men and women are portrayed at different points in life. From this, she concludes the following:

[T]he exhibition narrative tells a story where men are young at the beginning of time and middle aged at the end of the story. As the time in the narrative passes, society is described as increasingly hierarchical and complex. The men gradually gain power and are assigned titles such as lords and kings. Women, on the other hand, are older and have authority far back in time but get younger and less important as the narrative moves forward in time. Women are not assigned titles like Lord or Queen; they are only mentioned as 'women' (2012:103).

In addition to this, there are several rooms of the exhibit where no women are present (105-106; 109). Of the figures that appear to be children, Bünz felt that only one was meant to represent a girl whereas the remaining two were supposed to represent boys (102).

Along with her examination of age, Bünz also investigates the spatial situation of particular figures. She notes that there seem to be more male figures placed at an elevation that requires the viewer to look up at them. In contrast, most of the female figures are placed at eye-level, with one figure being placed about stomach level for an average adult. In addition to these differences in elevation, Bünz notes that there are several female and child characters who are visually difficult to distinguish from the background (112-113). In the case of the portrayal of the Samí people, she concludes that "the intersecting effect is that the Sàmi women, children and elderly are not only distant, they are excluded – rendered invisible behind a middle-aged man" (113). Bünz thus asserts that the simple addition of female characters to an exhibit's narrative does not adequately address issues of representation highlighted by an Intersectional approach. The existing paradigm of androcentric, Eurocentric museums is upheld by an uncritical examination of the portrayal of Intersecting factors of identity in their exhibits.

The chapter by Fredrik Fahlander examines the treatment of osteological remains from an Intersectional Theoretical perspective. One of Fahlander's main goals is to explain how Intersectionality can be readily applied to archaeology in a way that is both sensitive to the complex issues of identity surrounding corporeality while still maintaining a degree of scientific rigor (2012:138). In particular, Fahlander focuses on how Intersectionality can be applied to the intersection of biological sex and gender identity. He explains how osteology can likely elucidate a person's sex, and that this can help explain their experiences. He relates this to corporeality, noting:

One facet is that our corporeality is often related to the way we are able to act in the world. Our bodily constitution (height, muscles, etc.) may facilitate some tasks while prohibiting others. The other facet concerns the body as a surface and focus on phenotypical characteristics that potentially may work as imperatives for social subjectivation and categorization (2012:142).

For Fahlander, the Intersection of corporeality and external materiality is especially relevant to understanding burial archaeology (2012: 148-149). One of his central arguments is the idea of treating the body as a three-dimensional figure. His major concern in dealing with burial archaeology is that archaeologists are too inclined to see human remains as osteological data (2012:145-147). Instead, Fahlander proposes the idea that biological evidence should be “supported in some way by other evidence”, here meaning associated material culture along with body shape and facial attributes (2012:149). This fits well within an Intersectional perspective because it helps acknowledge the humanity of previously living people and explores how their corporeal and material interactions might have impacted their identities and experiences. Fahlander’s “neomaterialist perspective of the body in combination with an intersectional standpoint also transcends polarities such as biology versus culture and male versus female” (2012:149), thus enabling the archaeologist to act with a degree of academic rigor while still acknowledging the nebulosity of identity.

Another publication that focuses on Intersectionality in museums is the 2013 article “Which Genocide Matters the Most? An Intersectionality Analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights”. This article, written by Olena Hankivsky and Rita Kaur Dhamoon focuses on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). The museum, which opened in 2014, was the subject of some controversy surrounding its depictions of genocide. Although the museum initially began as a private project, the government soon allocated a substantial amount of money for the institution (Hankivsky and Dahmoon 2013:899-900). This museum is unique because it is

“the first museum solely dedicated to the evolution, celebration and future of human rights” (Canadian Museum of Human Rights). Due to the nature of the space, it makes sense that several exhibits would focus extensively on human rights violations such as genocide. However, one of the main issues that the museum faced during its planning phases was which genocides to focus on. Hankivsky and Dahmoon note that “[f]rom the very outset, the CMHR has been plagued by controversies about how it best represents ‘the subject of human rights’” (Hankivsky and Dahmoon 2013:902). While this article was written before the institution’s opening in September of 2014, they note that the museum’s inception was fraught with divisiveness. Divisive issues included: “which cases of human rights violations should be exhibited, how much space should be allotted to each case, and whether or not featured examples should be housed in permanent or temporary galleries and exhibitions” (Ibid:902). In particular, the authors note that the depiction of the Holocaust was a source of some debate. The authors approach this issue through the lens of Intersectional Theory, explaining that “The avoidance of oversimplification, erasure of differences, and the inevitability of conflict[...] can be mitigated by deploying the tools of intersectionality. Ultimately, our application of intersectionality to a case study of the CMHR offers some directions for navigating the controversies about content” (Hankivsky and Dahmoon 2013: 916).

Perhaps the work most directly relevant for this project is Karen Mary Davalos’s 2001 Publication *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora*. This book focuses on the examination of multiple museums and cultural heritages sites through what Davalos calls “a radical/lesbian Chicana feminist approach to representational practices” (2001:86). Although Davalos never explicitly calls her project ‘Intersectional’, her analysis develops and presents an interpretive framework that centralizes those who inhabit multiple

interacting spheres of oppression. To further elaborate, Davalos articulates that her radical/lesbian Chicana feminist positioning:

breaks from the conventions and limitations of anthropology, museum research, and Chicano studies by writing from the perspective of radical/lesbian Chicana feminism. This feminist positioning embraces the variations in representation practices, locating their complexity and ambiguity in the experiences of continuous border crossings, multiple forms of social oppression (patriarchy, racism, capitalism, homophobia), and territorial displacement, to name a few (Ibid:15).

Davalos begins her book with an anecdote in which she explores her first experiences in a public museum. As a child, she went on a class trip to a California museum and felt alienated when she noticed that Mexicans and indigenous people were represented as both “frivolous *and* hostile” (Ibid:4, emphasis original) while White settlers were praised as bringing civilization to the savages (Ibid:4-5). She provides personal insight into how significant museum representation is, especially when considering traditionally marginalized groups. She goes on to discuss how public museums in the United States have created specific narratives about the ideal citizen, and how this construction results in the “subordination of lived experience into a *singular* and masculinized standard” (Ibid: 35 emphasis original). Davalos chronicles some of the historical contexts of these narratives, examining relevant social events such as the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924 (Ibid:36). In addition to creating the image of an ideal--here, White, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied--Davalos also argues that one of the primary functions of museums has been to act as a way of enforcing class boundaries (Ibid:38-41). Finally, Davalos explores museums as educational institutions that serve two primary functions: 1) they act as a vehicle by which cultural values are replicated, including abstract ideas like quality and value (Ibid:42-46) and 2) they provide didactic frameworks through which this dominant culture organizes and categories the world (Ibid:47-52).



For Davalos, these narrative frameworks ultimately further the interests of the dominant culture at the expense of those who embody multiple interacting spheres of oppression. She also ultimately argues that existing museological paradigms that focus on constructing stereotypical dichotomies of ‘us’ and ‘The Other’ are inadequate when considering the complexities of human variance and experience (Ibid: 56). The Intersectional framework of radical/lesbian Chicana feminism helps to expose and address these inadequacies both by “recover[ing] histories of representational practices typically ignored by U.S., Mexican, and Chicano nationalisms” (Ibid:59) and by “acknowledg[ing] the multiple experiences of mestizas/os in diaspora, looking for divergence and complexity instead of subsuming it under the banner of “community” (Ibid). To illustrate this, Davalos explores several significant artists and art collectives that have examined the diversity of experiences within Chicano/a diaspora (Ibid:64-78). She also examines how Chicano studies and visual narratives that have focused on Chicano experiences have often ignored women and LGBTQ individuals (Ibid:98-102). Here, the parallels between Davalos’s exploration of this erasure and Crenshaw’s examination of how the legal system, and American society as a whole, continues to fail Black women (1989:139-167) are especially evident.

Davalos begins her examination of specific museum sites with the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museums (MFACM). Similar to this project, she begins with an examination of the exhibits themselves (2001:108). However, Davalos does not “rest on a reading of an individual curator [or] how her personal biography, training, or scholarship influenced an exhibition” (Ibid:109). Instead, she chooses to explore the museum’s exhibits in detail, discussing how particular issues that are significant to Chicanos are represented. In addition to contemporary art exhibits, she examines the “Mexico, La Vision del Cosmos: Three Thousand Years of Creativity” exhibit that was on display at the MFACM from January 31 to May 31, 1992

(Ibid:149-150). This exhibit featured objects on loan from the Field Museum's Mesoamerican collection. Davalos examines how the MFACM utilized these objects to tell a story that was dramatically different from typical stories surrounding Mesoamerican culture. More specifically, the labels discuss the genocide that Native peoples in the Americas endured and frame European contact as being an event that was largely negative for indigenous Americans (Ibid:150). This particular choice stands in direct contrast to Davalos's first experience with the portrayal of Europeans as being brave, resourceful, and the Platonic ideal of an American citizen.

Davalos then discusses how the MFACM's conceptualization of the visitor is unique:

[T]he MFACM also positions Mexicano and Mexicana spectators as authors of their culture. By using *mestizaje*<sup>2</sup> and diaspora as a lens to understand representational practices, we can recuperate multiple subjects, divergent meanings, and numerous positions. At the same time, by using a lens that is not fixed or stable, we avoid narrow interpretations that preclude the complexity of Mexicans in the Americas (Ibid:155).

This Intersectional approach to exhibit design can be seen in the MFACM's exhibits in a variety of ways. First, the use of didactic, bilingual labels throughout the exhibits "ruptures the message initially conveyed in the artistic or ethnographic approach to objects" (Ibid:173). This is significant because it both lauds the object's artistic merits, and puts it into a broader historical context without "reproduc[ing] the exotic gaze on 'the other'" (Ibid). This suggests that culture, for the MFACM, is not a static entity that centralizes the concept of 'difference' (Ibid). Instead, Davalos notes that it "suggests fluid boundaries that transcend national allegiance, racial hierarchies, and other distinctions" (Ibid). The exhibits at the MFACM are also unusual in that they do not show linear progression through time, instead favoring a more cyclical narrative approach to exhibits. As Davalos earlier argues, linear progression through time both enforces an existing idea of White male progress as the end goal of all cultural progress and simultaneously

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<sup>2</sup> 'Mestizaje' is best defined as the unique blending of indigenous and Spanish colonial culture and biology. Its conceptualization is integral to Mexican national identity in Mexico.

ignores the contribution of traditionally marginalized peoples, especially those who embody multiple interacting spheres of oppression (Ibid:175). For Davalos, the emphasis on nonlinear constructions of time acts in direct contrast to how an androcentric and Eurocentric culture has historically viewed the concepts of time and progress as being inherently connected to the advancements of White men. Davalos also discusses that the variety of topics and media covered by the museum's exhibits is extremely diverse. As such, she concludes that "[f]rom an overlapping and multi-dimensional exhibition season that rejects a one-dimensional Mexican subject, I infer that a diversity of Mexican-descendant spectators can find themselves within the visual mestizaje of the MFACM" (Ibid:175). However, Davalos does indicate that the MFACM does not always engage in truly Intersectional exhibit design in that the institution often limits or downplays exhibits that focus on the contributions of women artists (Ibid). While Chicanas may be underrepresented on the MFACM's walls (Ibid:175-176), Davalos does conclude that the museum provides other educational programs and performance art pieces that highlight female artists (Ibid 175-182).

Davalos goes on to discuss the fact that the positionality of the visitor at the MFACM is significant, and argues that visitors of color have consistently had to navigate museums where they see themselves "as if they are looking at themselves through another's vision" (Ibid:183). While this is arguably the case for all museum visitors (Cain 2008; Falk and Dierking 2016), the fact that colonized and subaltern populations have historically been represented solely by their colonizers and oppressors has resulted in exhibits that are traditionally curated *about* colonized groups rather than *for and by* colonized groups. The MFACM's approach to visitors is unique, especially when engaging Chicano/Chicana audiences in that it "speaks to Mexican spectators as sites of authority and positions these viewers as experts, [and] sources of knowledge" (Davalos

2001:183). The MFACM also takes this a step further by assuming that the perspective of its visitors is Mexicano (Ibid: 184). This means that it also centralizes the Mexican perspective when considering identity and representation. However, Davalos argues that this privileging of Mexican voices does not result in the “redirect[ion] of oppression [...] but one that momentarily allows Mexican spectators to envision themselves as subjects in the nation(s)” (Ibid). In the case of the MFACM this perspective, unfortunately, does emphasize some perspectives more than others (Ibid:175-176, 184). However, that does not negate the project’s effectiveness. According to Davalos, the “racist and sexist assumptions about Mexicanos and Mexicanas are unmade in the moment of viewing and interpreting an exhibition” (Ibid:186).

Davalos does acknowledge that new museology has resulted in significant changes to how European Americans and Native Americans are portrayed. Instead of focusing solely on the advancements of Europeans and the barbarity of the Native Americans and Mexicans, exhibits are more prone to discussing how disastrous contact proved to be for Native peoples. However, Davalos also notes that these Eurocentric narratives have not been completely eradicated. Specifically, she mentions that “[the exhibits praise] the military outposts for bringing commerce and stability to the West, as if Native Americans had neither” (Ibid:192). Additionally, new exhibits often frame the European genocide of Native Americans as though it resulted in the total annihilation of ‘real’ Native peoples and their culture while ignoring the rich and vibrant descendant communities that still inhabit the Americas (Ibid).

Davalos positions her examination of diaspora and mestizaje as being “contrary to much of anthropology’s paradigms and goals” (Ibid:194). There are several reasons for this, though the most significant is because “diaspora experience cannot circumscribe its subject, as a theoretical model it cannot commit to objectivism, since those living in diaspora are never separate from

their social analyst” (Ibid). Davalos also argues that “mestiza/o cultures are always multiple and contingent and cannot promote fixed, static or total normative accounts” (Ibid). This differs from traditional approaches to both anthropology and ethnic studies, especially because it is comfortable with a relative degree of ambiguity when exploring complex issues of representation and identity (Ibid). However, while postmodern anthropology also explores the uncertainty inherent in particular aspects of identity formation, Davalos’s theoretical positioning is unique in that it asserts that collective identities are constructed in deliberate and highly motivated ways (Ibid:195). Ultimately, she concludes that:

fixed identities are not a central part of a Mexicana/o experience [...] The porous and contradictory character of mestizaje suggests that identities have been open and contested for a long time. The value of mestizaje and diaspora, however, is the ability of this organic episteme to make fluidity and contradiction into an acknowledged cultural process (Ibid:196).

### **Intersectionality in Popular Culture**

While the works of Crenshaw, Collins, and other notable scholars helped to increase academic awareness and discussion of Intersectionality, one of the most striking things about its history is how rapidly and comprehensively it has been incorporated into both the academic and popular spheres. The rise of social media and internet usage has helped disseminate Intersectional Theory to people with an immense variety of backgrounds and experiences. In the past decade, not only has social media usage increased, but the way in which it is used has also changed. Now, social media is more or less ubiquitous, and it encourages the collaboration of groups with similar goals. While those who spearhead traditional activist and social justice work are often familiar with Intersectional Theory, this is not always true for those traditionally disenfranchised. Higher education has been traditionally unavailable or unwelcoming to People of Color, women, economically disadvantaged people, and other subaltern populations. This is

especially problematic because these communities have the most to gain from social activist movements focused on equality. However, social media actually works to establish a dialogue and increase accessibility to information like Intersectional Theory (Schradie 2012; Schuster 2013). For this reason, many activists who are more familiar with it choose to highlight the importance of Intersectionality on social media such as Twitter or Facebook. This encourages those who may not have access to a traditional classroom setting to learn more about issues of representation and identity.

When discussing the rise of Intersectionality in mainstream, as opposed to academic, spheres there are several indicators of this trend. Google Trends provides data about how often a particular term is searched for. The data stretches back to 2004, and can be compared by year, month, or week. When examining the data to through 2016, the searchterms ‘Intersectionality’ and ‘Intersectional Feminism’ both have an overall positive correlation over time (Figure 2.2). This increases most rapidly from October of 2011 to through 2016, with peak interest during the months leading up to the United States’ Presidential Election of 2016 (GoogleTrends). While this increase makes sense in the context of issues of social justice and equality that came to forefront of political discourse in connection with the election, it does not sufficiently account for the overall positive trend in public interest in Intersectional Theory that has occurred over the past 13 years. Other factors must be considered, especially the rise of social media activism.

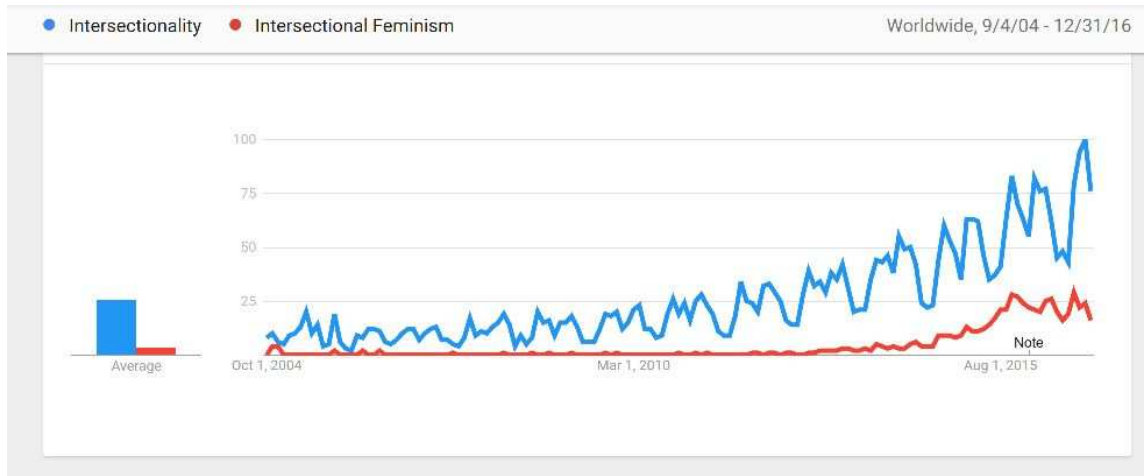


Figure 2.2. GoogleTrends graph demonstrating the increase in searches for Intersectionality (blue) and Intersectional Feminism (red) from October 1, 2004 to October 1, 2017.

Another of the potential reasons for, and indicators of, this increased interest in Intersectional Theory in popular culture is the degree to which Intersectionality is discussed in other Web sources. While these views have always been relatively common on feminist and social justice sites such as Jezebel and Feministing, their slow migration to more mainstream sites is notable. It may not be surprising that left-leaning sources like *The Huffington Post* or *Mother Jones* discuss these topics, but more moderate news outlets have also begun to do so. Both *The Economist* and *The New York Times* have featured articles about Intersectionality and its role in social justice. *The Washington Post* has made recent efforts to include multiple discussions about Intersectionality. In September of 2015, they featured a short series about Intersectionality. This series was composed of several articles and editorials, including a piece by Crenshaw about Intersectionality’s history and basic principles (Crenshaw 2015: N.p).

The introduction to these articles was written by Christine Emba. Simply titled “Intersectionality: A Primer”, it acts as an introduction to *The Washington Post’s* series on Intersectionality. Of Intersectional Theory, Emba writes that it has “highlighted mainstream feminism’s tendency to leave some women out of the conversation” (2015:N.p.). She further

discusses some of its timely applications to pop-culture, citing specific examples from celebrities and the media. Embra then goes on to discuss the term's origins, citing Crenshaw's *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (1989) and including a link to a pdf of the article in the body of Embra's text. She then frames some of the current controversies surrounding Intersectional Theory, including criticisms about a "fixation [...that] resurrects and empowers 'identity politics,'" as well as "encouraging 'privilege-checking' as a form of bullying and silencing" (Ibid). Embra then outlines the structure of the series: six articles mainly consisting of editorials from known scholars and activists. In addition to the articles written about Intersectionality, *The Washington Post* provided people with a place to post their comments and opinions on the topic of Intersectional Theory, feminism, and social justice.

The first article in the series was written by Latoya Peterson, who is the Editor and Publisher of Racialicious.com. Racialicious is a website that focuses on "the intersection of race and pop culture" (Racialicious.tumblr.com) and was hacked in May 2016, most likely by White supremacist groups. Peterson is also an Editor at Large at Fusion, a left-leaning news site. Her opinion piece is entitled "Intersectionality is not a label". For Peterson, one of the most significant aspects of Intersectionality was that she "could stop fumbling for explanations about why [she] couldn't separate [her] blackness from [her] femaleness, why different kinds of discrimination happened to [her]" (2015: N.p). To Peterson, Intersectionality is most beneficial as a theoretical framework that explains how to combat social injustices and inequalities.

Peterson writes:

To understand intersectionality requires critical thinking. Perhaps this is why I flinch when I hear people refer to themselves as "intersectional feminists" — it's taking a term designed to complicate our understanding of society and flattening it into a label. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how a variety of oppressions can



intersect, and one that surrounds political activism. But the label is donned more as a mark of belonging than a rally to action (Ibid).

For Peterson, 'Intersectional Feminism' has become a phrase devoid of meaning. She laments the use of the word as a marker for one's personal sociopolitical beliefs and feels that the onus of bringing about social change has become overlooked for "yet another insiders' box to check" (Ibid). While Peterson acknowledges that there are celebrities who embrace the term, she feels that their actions do not reflect this system of beliefs. Rather, she acknowledges that "the historical divides that stem from not understanding the intrinsic differences in women's experiences grow ever larger" (Ibid). Peterson's fear, then, is that the term becomes a solely academic phenomenon and continues to ignore people who are directly impacted by systematic discrimination. While Peterson feels that the tenets of Intersectionality are important, she also feels that the word "Intersectionality" is alienating. She closes with some final thoughts about the true importance of Intersectionality:

The concept of intersectionality is still amazing. Crenshaw's work is still life giving. But now the burden is on those of us who claim feminism as a practice, to ensure that in our zeal to introduce new concepts into the broader world, we don't forget that the meaning of all of this political action is to engage others (Ibid).

The second of *The Washington Post's* articles on Intersectionality is "How 'Orange Is the New Black' wins at illustrating identity". This piece was written by Alyssa Rosenberg, a writer for *The Washington Post*. Rosenberg's main project is to use the popular Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* to demonstrate how Intersectionality can be readily applied to a realistic set of characters. Rosenberg outlines two kinds of characters present in traditional films and television: The "Just Happen To Bes", and the "Others". She defines the "Just Happen To Bes" as people who "live in a world where their identities don't really matter" (2015: N.p). She elaborates by saying, "[a] world where it's truly no different, for example, for a [B]lack woman to be a cop

than for a [W]hite man to occupy that position is a world that has made substantially more social progress than the one we actually occupy” (Ibid). The “Others”, however, live in a world where their identities, and aspects of their identities, dramatically impact their experiences within a given narrative. According to Rosenberg, “it’s at the intersection of [the characters’] multiple group memberships that particularly interesting things happen” (Ibid). She then goes on to discuss several of the show’s characters and how their racial, sexual, and gendered identities complicate their lives and experiences. One of the most valuable aspects of the show’s portrayal of identity is its ability to examine the diverse experiences associated with being a person of any identity marker. As a proponent of Intersectionality, Rosenberg reiterates, “those many different ways of being demand harder, more detailed work that has to be done before we can really say that women, or people of color, or LGBT people are equal” (Ibid).

Brittney Cooper’s article “Black lives matter--all of them” is a brief opinion piece about inclusivity and accessibility in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social justice movement. Cooper is an assistant professor of Women’s and Gender Studies and Africana at Rutgers University. She also co-founded Crunk Feminist Collective, a blog and news aggregate dedicated to Black Feminism and Intersectional discourse. In her article for *The Washington Post*, Cooper writes about the experiences of Black transgender and non-gender conforming individuals. While she acknowledges that they “played a critical role in organizing the first national convening of the Movement for Black Lives, more widely known under the banner of Black Lives Matter” (2015: N.p.), she also discusses the need for trans safe spaces, citing an event where a trans man was forcibly removed from the men's bathroom at a BLM event. Cooper acknowledges that this did encourage people to think more about Intersectionality and how to be more inclusive. The BLM community had a discussion about providing gender-neutral bathrooms and utilizing more

gender neutral language in its discourse. For example, the term ‘brothers and sisters’ has been replaced with ‘siblings’ or ‘sibs’. As Cooper acknowledges, “The call for a new term [such as sibs] exists at the unique intersection of black identity and gender nonconformity [...] I am struck by how much this particular use of the word evokes a more mature and evolved notion of intersectionality.” (Ibid). While Cooper praises the Black activist community for the adoption of this term, she also challenges them to continue to actively champion the rights of all Black people, citing Crenshaw’s inception of Intersectionality as being deeply rooted in the experiences of a diverse Black population. For Cooper, it is paramount that Black Lives Matter be dedicated to social justice for all Black people. She states, “Today, you cannot claim to be invested in an expansive notion of black freedom if you do not acknowledge the range of experiences that shape all the black people in a room” (Ibid). Cooper then states that Intersectionality has not been of enough importance to the Black activist community in the past, and she makes an impassioned plea for its use in the future.

The next article in *The Washington Post*’s Intersectionality series is written by Lauren Sudeall Lucas: an assistant professor at Georgia State University College of Law. Her article, “Here’s why Equal Protection may not protect everyone equally”, focuses on the legal implications of Intersectionality. Lucas acknowledges that all women experience forms of workplace discrimination such as inadequate family leave and the wage gap. However, she also asserts that “women of color may face different obstacles, including a bigger wage gap and the perception that they are too aggressive” (Lucas 2015:N.p). She also includes links to studies that demonstrate both of these issues in the body of her article. Lucas then discusses how The Equal Protection clause is used to determine whether or not an incident of discrimination occurs on the legal level. First, it must be determined what kind of discrimination took place. This is predicated

upon a variety of factors, such as race, gender, sex, and ability level. Lucas then asserts that, “Depending on the category invoked, courts will apply varying levels of analysis to the claim, making it easier or harder for those accused of discrimination to defend their policies” (Ibid).

This is problematic, however, for people who fit into multiple traditional subaltern categories.

According to Lucas:

[F]or those who face discrimination at the intersection of multiple identity categories, it is not immediately clear how a court should respond. If someone claims that she has been denied the equal protection of the law because she is a [B]lack woman, should the alleged discrimination be examined with strict scrutiny, the most stringent standard of review in the court system, which is applied to classifications based on race? Or should it be treated with intermediate scrutiny, the lesser standard typically applied to gender classifications? (Ibid).

These categories and their implication are problematic because they create an inevitable sense of ingroup versus outgroup and result in the further marginalization of traditionally disenfranchised groups. As Lucas asserts, this practice of having discrete categories “demands, in a sense, that we strictly define the experience of each identity category” (Ibid). Since each individual’s experiences are different, and that diversity should be respected and considered in legal instances, this creates a dangerous precedent. Instead of focusing on whether or not discrimination is based on one particular aspect of identity, such race or gender, Lucas feels that “we should ask whether it serves the same purpose as those kinds of discrimination do — further subordinating a group that is not in a position to prevent such subordination” (Ibid). If this can be accomplished, Lucas argues that it is possible to more accurately understand how the intersections of varying forces of oppression can be dismantled.

Kimberle Crenshaw also wrote an article for *The Washington Post*’s series on Intersectionality. Her article, entitled “Why Intersectionality can’t Wait”, summarizes some of the original history surrounding the concept of Intersectionality. She discusses the 1978 legal

case of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* and how this case was dismissed because the court did not feel that the Black women could combine their claims of gender discrimination and racial discrimination into one claim. In Crenshaw's own words, "Because they could not prove that what happened to them was just like what happened to white women or black men, the discrimination that happened to these black women fell through the cracks" (Crenshaw 2015: N.p). She outlines how this case influenced her personal and professional philosophical development. Crenshaw says that her ultimate goal was "to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination law do what I thought they should — highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand" (Ibid). She addresses some of the criticisms surrounding Intersectionality, including conservative concern about the correlation between Intersectionality and "identity politics". However, Crenshaw asserts that intersectionality is not just about identities but about the institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege" (Ibid). Intersectionality has the ability to unite social justice movements traditionally aimed at different aspects of identity and encourage them to work together as a more collaborative unit. One of the other common critiques of Intersectionality that Crenshaw discusses is the perceived disconnect between theory and practice. Many critics of Intersectionality center on the idea that Intersectional Theory acts as a label or a particular way of speaking about issues of social justice rather than actually enacting change. To this, Crenshaw offers the following, "we've been 'talking' about racial equality since the era of slavery and we're still not even close to realizing it. Instead of blaming the voices that highlight problems, we need to examine the structures of power that so successfully resist change" (Ibid). Finally, Crenshaw addresses how some feel that Intersectionality and privilege-checking encourage a hostile atmosphere, especially for people

who experience simultaneous instances of privilege and oppression. However, one of the most significant benefits of Intersectionality is that it works to explain how these factors of identity interact to shape and limit people's experiences. Crenshaw does acknowledge that "Intersectionality alone cannot bring invisible bodies into view" (Ibid). Instead, she challenges those in positions of privilege to work for more inclusive approaches to social justice.

While the majority of *The Washington Post's* articles about Intersectionality focused on a femme-centric perspective, the final article examines an Intersectional approach to masculinity. Jamil Smith is a senior editor at *The New Republic*, a left-leaning magazine focusing on politics and current events. He also hosts a podcast called INTERSECTION, which focuses on Intersectional Theory and identity. In his article "Why we need a new masculinity", Smith focuses on an Intersectional approach to Black masculine identity. In the beginning of his piece, Smith asserts "Growing up black isn't just about skin color; it's about gender as well. It's about how you internalize what the world tells you about your manhood and your sexuality, and eventually how you feel about yourself" (2015: N.p). While Smith reflects about his need to code-switch due to his race, he admits that he never felt the same need to camouflage his masculinity. This was even true when he was in a mostly femme space. However, he also discusses the consequences of this, saying "My [male] experience still reflects the reality of our nation, but it is a privilege that can lead to an underdeveloped sense of empathy and a disregard for the welfare of those who don't share it" (Ibid). Smith goes on to explain that men have only recently begun to see themselves as marginalized. He points to the rising concern about false rape accusations and affirmative action that benefits women. However, Smith also notes that "being called sexist, or even a rapist, has somehow become worse than experiencing sexism or rape. Men and boys can be found all over the internet lamenting the 'feminization' of spaces that

their own entitlement has told them they possess and control” (Ibid). Smith then discusses how modern media continues to prioritize White male experience and enables their false sense of victimization. Smith further iterates that “No system of oppression is more widespread or enables more crimes than sexism. But the patriarchal structure of our society isn’t sustained merely by gender bias; racial bias helps, too” (Ibid). He implores men, especially those who are impacted by racism, classism, homophobia, or other kinds of intolerance to approach masculinity with an increased awareness of the importance of Intersectionality. The only way to truly combat toxic masculinity is, according to Smith, by encouraging men and boys to become involved in its deconstruction.

### **Criticisms and Limitations of Intersectional Theory**

As mainstream awareness of Intersectionality has increased, a number of criticisms of it have surfaced. As with all social justice movements, there has been significant pushback from people who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. People in positions of relative social privilege, such as economically advantaged White men, are often less inclined to see the need for a more inclusive dialogue (Curtain et al. 2015:523-525). Those who claim to be in favor of freedom of speech and against political correctness suggest that an increased awareness of Intersectionality will threaten (“civil”?) discourse about controversial opinions (Gordon 2016:340).

Another critique of Intersectionality is that it will increase the divide between people of diverse experiences and identities. Identity Politics have proven controversial since they first came to the forefront of political discussions during the Civil Rights Era. Some critics feel that groups who form political alliances based on shared markers of identity can distract from crucial issues, such as socioeconomic class discrepancies, and that this often hinders the formation of

solidarity among groups that otherwise have common interests. However, an Intersectional perspective acknowledges that understanding identity is crucial to understanding a person's political motivations. In her 1991 article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color", Crenshaw discusses how Identity Politics fit into Intersectional Theory. She argues that bringing people together who share a common marker of identity is important as it encourages solidarity and provides people with a way to fight for their rights as a community. Unlike many critics, Crenshaw says that "[t]he problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend differences, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (1991:124).

Intersectionality asserts that all aspects of a person's identity are relevant. Therefore, there are no issues where an Intersectional approach to identity can be discounted. Socioeconomic class discrepancies, for example, impact people differently. These differences are based on multiple factors of identity and how those factors interact. A poor White man's experiences are very different from those of a poor Black woman.

Intersectionality's increase in mainstream usage and acceptance has also resulted in several critiques from academics and scholars. Primarily, one of the major concerns surrounding the use of Intersectionality in popular culture is whether or not supporters of Intersectional models of equality have adequate understanding of the concept. In particular, there is the misconception among several social justice writers and activists that Intersectionality "is about understanding your privilege, and realizing that there are certain institutionalized forms of oppression that you don't face, but one important thing is to remember that *all oppression is connected*" (Boyer 2016:np, emphasis original). However, this statement is misleading for several reasons. First, Intersectionality fundamentally asserts that the embodiment of multiple



facets of identity that are subject to oppression, race, gender, ability level, age, etc create additional permutations and combinations of existing structures of inequality. One example of this is how racism and misogyny combine in particular ways to form misogynoir, or the institutional oppression of Black women.

While misogyny and racism are connected in the structure of misogynoir, this is specifically because of the Intersectional identity of Black women. In other words, instead of ‘all forms of oppression are connected’, Intersectionality asserts that ‘all forms of oppression that impact a specific individual or group are connected’. This distinction might seem subtle, but it is actually crucial to understanding Intersectionality and its relationship to issues of representation. Asserting that all oppression is connected oversimplifies how individual communities are impacted by systematic discrimination in very particular ways. If all forms of oppression are connected, then there must be an underlying cause or structure that provides the backbone for these systems. This, then, creates a structural hierarchy of oppression by searching for *how* all forms of oppression are linked at a systemic level. For example, several radical feminist scholars have postulated that misogyny or the desire to control women’s reproductive capabilities is the overarching structure by which all other forms of oppression occur. If this is true, then abolishing structural misogyny would eradicate all other forms of bigotry and oppression, such as racism. But, Intersectional Theory asserts that this is not the case because the issues that impact Women of Color come from the interaction *between* racism and sexism. Furthermore, the assumption that all forms of oppression are connected creates a hierarchy of priorities in terms of identity, which is what Intersectionality is attempting to mitigate in the first place.

When discussing Intersectionality and its applications to a variety of social justice issues, it is paramount to consider Crenshaw’s initial project. She writes that:

“[i]t is not necessary to believe that a political consensus to focus on the lives of the most disadvantaged will happen tomorrow in order to recenter discrimination discourse at the intersection. It is enough, for now, that such an effort would encourage us to look beneath the prevailing conceptions of discrimination and to challenge the complacency that accompanies belief in the effectiveness of this framework. By doing so, we may develop language which is critical of the dominant view and which provides some basis for unifying activity. The goal of this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: “When they enter, we all enter” (1989: 166-167).

The initial goal of Intersectional Theory, then, can best be seen as providing a framework that explains why it is necessary to approach issues of systematic oppression from a bottom-up approach. This focuses on addressing the needs of the most disenfranchised within a given group, in other words, those who are impacted by multiple forms of oppression. Applications of equality movements must be rooted in Intersectional Theory if they are to remain relevant and truly champion the causes of traditionally marginalized groups. To paraphrase Crenshaw’s words in a later article, the importance of Intersectionality is in its ability to bolster further social justice efforts in a practical setting (2015). Ultimately, it acts as a way of critiquing existing manifestations of sociocultural inequality and exploring initial steps that can be taken to address these issues. However, its application to a wide range of diverse topics must also be conducted in tandem with other project-specific methodologies.

## CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL MUSEOLOGY AND COMMUNITY CURATION

### Introduction

In addition to the application of Intersectional Theory, this project also benefits from an examination and application of critical museology texts. As previously discussed, Intersectionality is useful in that it provides a framework for understanding the underlying structures of social hierarchy that result in disenfranchisement or erasure. However, the addition of other bodies of literature is important because they further explore how to best deal with the lack of, or limits in, representation of Native American women in museum exhibits. This chapter discusses how the field of critical museology has informed several notable shifts in praxis in regards to the representation of traditionally marginalized groups.

In order to understand Intersectional Theory's direct applications to the complex issue of representation of Native American women in museum exhibits, it is first necessary to discuss the history of critical museology. This project examines the rise of this field vis-à-vis a number of postcolonial theoretical applications to representation in museums. From there, it discusses how these studies formed the initial impetus for the development of community curation. In addition to addressing the need for community curation, it examines how the field has changed over time. This includes exploring several different approaches to community curation combined with an analysis of particular circumstances in which a specific methodology might be employed. Finally, it provides several notable examples of how community curation has been utilized in other institutions to address the complex issues of representation and ownership of the past.

### History and Overview

As Amanda J. Cobb notes, “[m]useums offer significant bodies of scholarship and knowledge that cannot be discounted; nevertheless, museological practices are underpinned by

Western epistemologies, systems of classification, and ideological assumptions that, when applied to Native Americans, have functioned in exploitative, objectifying, and demeaning ways” (2005:487). The benefit, then, to community-based curation is that it acts in direct opposition to traditional Western knowledge systems which are intrinsically Eurocentric. Collaborative and community-based anthropology and curation seeks to rectify this by actively incorporating the perspectives of traditionally disenfranchised groups (Kreps 1998:5-8; Turner 2011:40-41). This collaboration works to help ensure that indigenous groups, for example, have the agency and ability to tell their stories. It also provides new ways of thinking about how exhibits are constructed and whether or not curatorial bias is influencing the representation of marginalized populations.

In a section of her 2003 Introductory chapter to *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*'s section entitled “Community collaboration in exhibitions: toward a dialogic paradigm”, Ruth B. Phillips discusses the development of more collaborative exhibits as a deliberate ‘paradigmatic shift’ (155) reminiscent of that discussed in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). More specifically, Phillips alludes to museum professionals’ development within the museum field as being akin to the scientist’s development within the sciences. For Phillips, collaborative museology is revolutionary in the Kuhnian sense of the word as it emphasizes both a “new form of power sharing” (1962:157) centered on rectifying “past asymmetries of power in the treatment of intellectual property” (ibid:159). Prior to the paradigmatic shift of collaborative museology, past curatorial strategies of exhibit development can be likened to Kuhn’s concept of normal science. Previous exhibit development strategies have centered on “the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like” (Kuhn 1962:5). Here, the ‘scientific community’ is the museum field. Additionally, museum

professionals who engage in curation for large science and natural history museums are often practicing scientists and, therefore, members of the scientific community. However, the concept of ‘curator as scientist’ becomes problematized, as the museum community also presumes to know what the world *was* like. Collaborative museology, then, establishes a new paradigm by recognizing “the need to repair the psychological damage that has been done in the past to individuals forced to negotiate negative stereotypes by creating new exhibits that disseminate more accurate (and usually positive) images of contemporary ways of life” (Phillips 2002: 158-159). However, one of the most critical elements of Kuhn’s trajectory of the development of scientific revolutions is the idea of novelty. For Kuhn, “novelty ordinarily emerges only for the man who, knowing with precision what he should expect, is able to recognize that something has gone wrong” (1962:65). While Kuhn focuses more on the fields of physics, applied mathematics, and traditionally hard sciences, this novelty can be seen in the museum field as well. In this instance, novelty is most evident in the ways in which museum audiences typically respond to exhibits. More specifically, the increased efforts of social movements for racial and gender equality have pushed back against the existing paradigm of museums’ “historical legacy of objectification” (Phillips 2002:159). This, in turn, has encouraged museum professionals to question museums as institutions that construct “universalist ideologies and nationalist power structures that inform modern societies” (157). This deeper interrogation of museums and their depiction of identity has resulted in an increased emphasis on postmodernism in the museum field. In this instance, postmodern and postcolonial theory have illuminated the need for a new paradigm within museums; one that is focused on multivocality and a more egalitarian approach to exhibits.

Phillips argues that these collaborative exhibits exist on a spectrum and that there are two main kinds of collaborative exhibits: the community-based exhibit, and the multivocal exhibit (2002:159). Both of these exhibits have different goals and rely on different interpretive frameworks. Community-based exhibits are exhibits where museum curators act as aids to community members. The community decides on themes, objects, stories, and other elements of the exhibit creation. The museum and museum professionals then use their expertise to design and install an exhibit that meets the community's specifications. This type of exhibit generally considers community members to be the primary audience, and often does not explain ethnographic objects in a way that someone from outside the community could readily understand (Phillips 2002:162). One of the other concerns that many people have about these kinds of exhibits is that they do not always pay tribute to the role of museums and museum professionals in exhibit design and development (161).

In contrast, the multivocal exhibit is more concerned with developing so-called traditional museum exhibits while incorporating the experiences of historically marginalized peoples. This trend seems to be fairly popular and Phillips notes that it is utilized and encouraged by both liberal and conservative groups (160). As with previous museum exhibits, multivocal exhibits do not assume that descendant communities are the primary audience. However, museum professionals work with communities to try to present a more accurate account of "The Past". This type of exhibit, however, is often criticized for its overly optimistic view of past, present, and future relations between colonizing and colonized groups. Instead of focusing on telling the stories of struggle that non-Western groups face, these exhibits can often focus on whitewashing history through the use of blithe rhetoric. Phillips asks the provocative question, "do collaboratively produced exhibits present museum audiences with celebrations of diversity

and dreams of social harmony that cannot be realized in the real world of legal rights, property, land, and money?” (2002:167).

Collaborative museum exhibits first emerged in the United States and Canada during the early 1990s. However, several professional museological organizations were already advocating for concepts that included multivocality and an increased emphasis on the experiences of traditionally marginalized communities. Two exhibits at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology are often considered to be among the first exhibits to focus on community-based curation (Ames 1999:41-43). These exhibits were developed as a cooperative effort between the First Nations peoples who lived in the area, and museum staff. Both of these exhibits were “in direct response to the challenge to develop new and equal forms of partnership that was issued to Canadian museums and indigenous peoples by the 1992 report of the national Task Force on Museums and First Peoples” (Phillips 2002:157).

### **Examples of Community Curation**

While the multivocal approach is more common in modern exhibits about Native Americans, some institutions have developed community-based exhibits as well. In the case of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), the entire institution is dedicated to this community-based approach to community curation. This particular framework changes several notable aspects of the institution. First, it provides exhibits with a novel narrative structure. Traditional exhibits about Native Americans tend to follow one of four specific archetypes: the geographical exhibit, the history-period exhibit, the habitat exhibit, or the visible storage display (A. Cobb 2005:495; Nason 2000: 34-39; Shannon 2014). In contrast, the NMAI focuses on constructing an interdisciplinary examination of Native history, identity, and culture. It, therefore, privileges Native American ways of knowing in order to challenge the existing

presentation of “Native American peoples as “other” and frequently, whether intentionally or not, as exotic and/or inferior” (A. Cobb 2005: 495).

Another way that the NMAI seeks to change existing Eurocentric museological paradigms includes a focus on how they handle the care of specific objects. Native and traditional museological approaches to object curation differ in their ultimate concerns (Kreps 1996: 5-17; Lonetree 2012:109-114). More specifically, while “Western museology is concerned with an object’s ‘physical integrity and attributes as evidence of cultural, historical, or scientific phenomena,’ Native traditional care is concerned with an object’s spiritual care integrity and meaning and function within its community” (A. Cobb 2005: 494). By centralizing Native experiences and Native knowledge systems, the National Museum of the American Indian creates an unorthodox museum experience that is deeply concerned with accurate and thoughtful representation of Native American cultures and individuals.

In addition to the NMAI, several other institutions have developed community-based exhibits. Elizabeth Cooke discusses several of these examples in her chapter “Museums and Community” in the 2010 publication *A Companion to Museum Studies*, focusing specifically on how multiple state museums in Mexico have begun to explore diverse concepts of identity (174-176). She notes that one of the major reasons for its success is its “bottom-up effort”, which is in-keeping with an Intersectional approach to exhibit development, however it is important to note that not all community-based exhibits are ultimately Intersectional, especially if they have a narrow and exclusionary idea of the concept of ‘community’ For Cooke, though, the value of community curation is evident; these museums are ultimately successful because they have encouraged “a greater sense of collective ownership” (176). She also mentions the success of community-based exhibits in Northern Ireland, in particular those curated through the People’s



History Initiative at Ulster People's College in Belfast. In these exhibits, the community decides what stories to tell, what objects to include, and every other aspect of the curation process.

Cooke notes that one significant benefit of this type of community-based curation is that it is “valued as part of a process; it is not an end in and of itself, but a means to an end, the development of shared community identity” (ibid). This is perhaps the most significant benefit of community-based curation. While an increased emphasis in multivocality is necessary in an increasingly connected world, community-based curation has the ability to uplift and empower people to feel pride in their community, especially if it is a traditionally disenfranchised community.

Another notable publication that discusses the relationship between community curation and empowerment of descendant communities is Amy Lonetree's 2012 publication *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. As a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and a museum professional, Lonetree provides unique insight into multiple aspects of museum work. *Decolonizing Museums* focuses on “three different sites of Indigenous self-representation” (2012:52) in order to explore how tribal museums can act as sites for promoting both empowerment and a sense of healing by acting as sites of decolonization (Ibid:50-52). She argues that they do this by:

honoring Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, challenging the stereotypical representations of Native people produced in the past, serving as sites of ‘knowledge making and remembering’ for their own communities and the general public, and discussing the hard truths of colonization in exhibitions in an effort to promote healing and understanding” (Ibid:52-53).

Lonetree examines how these processes can be observed at the National Museum of the American Indian, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and the Ziibiwing Center for Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways.

The first institution that Lonetree discusses is the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota. In 1997, the Historical Society worked in collaboration with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to open the Mille Lacs Indian Museum (Ibid:56). One of the most significant aspects of this museum's development was that the Historical Society had collaborated with the Mille Lacs Ojibwe band during all phases of development. As Lonetree explains, “[d]uring the initial planning stages [...], some believed that the Mille Lacs Indian Museum would have local and perhaps regional implications. But others recognized early on that this project could also have national importance” (Ibid:57). However, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum is significant in that it represents one particularly successful effort to develop what Lonetree refers to as a “hybrid tribal museum” (Ibid:58). Because it is a site of Native self-representation, it relies on an Indigenous construction of history and identity. However, Lonetree also argues that its status as a hybrid tribal museum results in a complex framework of identity. Since it is not officially a tribal museum, the Mille Lacs Band does not own any part of the museum, including its building and collection. Because of this, Lonetree postulates that, “while the Mille Lacs Indian Museum represents an important collaborative exhibition and museum project by privileging the voice and perspective of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, it has not yet fully achieved a decolonizing museum practice” (Ibid). Lonetree then outlines her involvement with the institution, and the museum's history (Ibid:58-64). Based on feedback from the Mille Lacs Band, the museum slowly began to realize the importance of engaging in a fully collaborative project. As such, they began monthly consultations with Mille Lacs Band members to ensure that the museum adequately addressed the needs of modern Native Americans. This included an increased emphasis on “contemporary issues [...] including education, treaty rights, powwows, economic development projects, language-retention programs and casinos” (Ibid:73) as opposed to an

object-based curatorial approach. While Lonetree lauds this increased emphasis on community involvement and empowerment, she does note that “underlying all [of the museum’s positive contributions], the relationship was colonial” (Ibid:96). Here, Lonetree’s statement is based on both the specific historical practices of White museum professionals who worked at this particular institution in the past, and, on the colonial framework of museums in general (Ibid:96-97). Given how the complexities of this history of colonial relationships are enacted at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, Lonetree asks whether or not “all tribally authored exhibitions [should be engaging] in the decolonizing project” (Ibid:97). While she admits that she has not “fully resolve[d] these questions within [her] own mind” (Ibid:97), she also acknowledges her belief that “addressing historical unresolved grief should be the primary function of a decolonizing museum practice in a tribal museum” (Ibid:97). Lonetree ultimately acknowledges that despite the institution’s limitations, the Mille Lac Indian Museum’s “collaborative exhibitions created there helped set the stage for what would follow in the larger museum world” (Ibid:99), specifically focusing on how these exhibit strategies were utilized in the National Museum of the American Indian (Ibid:99).

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian was the second site that Lonetree examines. As previously discussed, the NMAI provides several novel approaches to community curation that were in direct response to previous lack of Native involvement in the Museum of the American Indian--a previous incarnation of the institution--and in museums in general (Ibid:104-106). For Lonetree, the most significant undertaking of the NMAI was the “transfer of curatorial authority to Native people” (Ibid:111). However, she also wonders if the museum does enough to fully acknowledge the ramifications that centuries of colonialism and oppression have had on Native Americans. She compares the NMAI to the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and notes that the recent exhibits at the NMAI lack “the larger understanding of history--of colonization and of what Native peoples have faced for centuries” (Ibid:135). While Lonetree acknowledges the value of the NMAI’s collaborative approach to exhibit design, she fundamentally disagrees with the idea that the NMAI is inherently a decolonizing museum because it lacks true commitment to engaging in difficult topics such as genocide (Ibid:136-149). This is interesting, because it stands into direct contrast to Shannon’s examination of the NMAI which centralizes the institution as a model for engaging in the curation of Native American exhibits (Shannon 2014).

The final site that Lonetree examines is the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways. Located in Michigan, this institution is unique in that it “embodies a decolonizing museum practice and creates an engaging learning experience for visitors” (Ibid:150). In addition to privileging Indigenous ways of life, the exhibits also acknowledge historical trauma and how it continues to negatively impact indigenous communities. Lonetree lauds this choice noting, “I greatly respect [the community’s] willingness to speak of what we as Indigenous people know but are someone reluctant to talk about within a museum context. All too often we are concerned about coming across as if we are subscribing to the language of victimization” (Ibid:168). However, Lonetree concludes that in order for museums to act as a site of true collaboration, they also need to engage fully in the decolonization process (Ibid:192-193). She mentions several ways of doing this, including an increased emphasis on exhibits that focus on more than just Indigenous survivance (Ibid:200-201). Ultimately, she concludes that Native American exhibits must be fully willing to engage in the process of decolonization, including addressing historical trauma and how it continues to impact Indigenous communities in multiple, significant ways (Ibid:202).

In his 1997 publication, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford includes an essay that details the community curation efforts of four distinct museums in the Northwest Coast. These museums--The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, The Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre, The Royal British Columbia Museum, and the U'mista Cultural Center--are all located in Canada. The Kwagiulth Museum and the U'mista Cultural Center are both examples of tribal museums whereas The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology and The Royal British Columbia Museums represent a more Western academic approach to curation (Clifford 1997: 109-110). While both of the latter institutions do design exhibits in a more conventional way, Clifford notes that “the two museums are unusual in their sensitivity to the vitality and contestation of the traditions that they document” (Ibid:120). He further elucidates this by exploring their various interpretive strategies and visual narratives. While he acknowledges that “[s]ome degree of cultural contextualization is present in all the museums [he] visited” (Ibid:122), he also discusses that each institution’s focus on the visual and aesthetic qualities of particular objects “evokes both local and global meanings for the interpretive categories (or translation devices) of art, culture, politics, and history” (Ibid).

Clifford then discusses the differences in the goals of so-called ‘majority museums’ as compared to ‘minority museums’. Majority museums, for Clifford, are focused on appealing to a large and diverse audience as well as displaying significant objects that are considered to be ideal representations of particular art styles, cultures, and time periods. In contrast, Clifford argues that minority museums seek to subvert the dichotomy of art versus ethnographic object, present examples of colonial oppression, and include art that is significant for its use within the community (Ibid:121-122). However, Clifford also cautions against the assumption that minority

museums act as a direct response to majority museums, noting that “[t]he oppositional predicament of tribal institutions is, however, more complex” (Ibid:122).

One of the key elements that links The Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre and the U’mista Cultural Center is that they both privilege indigenous ways of knowing. This includes origin stories and accounts of significant community members that are not typically found within more conventional approaches to community curation, such as those at The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology and The Royal British Columbia Museums (Ibid:123-136). Clifford also explores how the U’mista Cultural Center discusses the negative impact of European contact and colonization on Native Americans by juxtaposing historical accounts and cultural objects (Ibid:136). For example, during the 1920s, the United States government outlawed the celebration of potlatches, or the ceremonial redistribution of wealth. In at least one instance, a potlatch was disturbed by government officials who coerced Native Americans into selling them multiple “cherished artifacts” (Ibid:123) for practically nothing. The U’mista Cultural Center includes paternalistic and racist quotes from the government officials who seized these objects next to quotes from community members. Each of these is positioned in front of regalia (Ibid:134-135). Clifford acknowledges the profound effect that this had on the viewer. He states that they “embarrassed, saddened, angered, and inspired” him (Ibid:136). This stands in direct contrast to the representation of objects from the same potlatch raid as they were displayed at the Royal British Columbia exhibit (Ibid:137). Here, history confronts the viewer and these objects are seen as being deeply involved in a political discussion about the nature of colonialism and White supremacy (Ibid).

Ultimately, Clifford concludes that neither tribal museums nor majority museums can “completely cover or control the important meanings and contexts generated by the objects they

display”, a concept that he explores further in his examination of museums as “contact zones” (Clifford 1999). Instead, he asserts that, “exchange and complementarity, rather than hierarchy, ideally should characterize their institutional relations” (Ibid). Clifford also highlights the difference between the two tribal museums, noting that while The Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre focuses more explicitly on highlighting family histories and community pride, the U’mistá Cultural Center demonstrates a more overtly political approach to exhibit design (Ibid:142). In light of the differences at these four institutions, Clifford asserts,

[m]y intention in opening up issues I can only begin to understand is not to assert the truth of one version of events over another, or the authenticity of one museum relative to another; I want simply to make visible to outsiders the complexity that is hidden behind words such as “local,” “tribal,” and “community” as if these were not differently interpreted and often contested (Ibid: 143-144).

These contested meanings are especially relevant when discussing community curation within museums. Even though historical approaches to community curation are based in the desire to accurately represent traditionally marginalized groups, the degree to which particular members of those groups are included or excluded is significant. As Intersectional Theory suggests, often those individuals who embody multiple interacting spheres of oppression are excluded, even when there have been efforts to include new perspectives.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SITE DESCRIPTIONS

### Introduction

Four specific sites were chosen for this project: The Abel Public Museum, The Pineville Public Museum, The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History, and the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology. Each of these institutions is located within the state of Wisconsin and each has exhibits that focus specifically on Native Americans. However, they otherwise have little in common. Each institution varies based on such factors as governance, audience composition, size, and level of community involvement. In order to protect the anonymity of both the institutions and their museum professionals, pseudonyms have been used throughout. This chapter provides detailed information about each institution surveyed as part of this project. In addition to utilizing census data to explore how each museum fits within a given community, the layout of each institution's Native American exhibits provides a more detailed spatial context of the curatorial strategies that were employed over time.

#### *The Abel Public Museum*

The Abel Public Museum (APM) is a local museum situated in the small town of Abel, Wisconsin. Abel is a town of about 7,000 people and is considered to be one of the larger municipalities in an area largely composed of small agricultural communities. Demographically speaking the Town of Abel is 90% White, however, there has been an influx of Latinx individuals in the last ten years. Currently, they make up the largest minority group in the community, comprising just shy of 7% of the town's population. The majority of the people living around the area are employed in agriculture or at one of Abel's many factories. Only about 18% of the population has a Bachelor's degree, which is significantly lower than the state average of 27%. The average household income is lower than the state average, but only 11% of



people live under the poverty line of \$24,300, compared with the state average of 13% (The United States Census Bureau).

The Abel Public Museum has had several locations in its history as an institution, however, it is currently attached to the Abel Public Library. It is a one-story red-brown brick building with cream to yellow trim. Approaching the building, the marriage of three different design styles becomes more obvious. The central portion of the building is the main entryway and features modern sensibilities. This portion was constructed in the 1980s and has modern design elements though it tries to mediate the styles of the two associated older buildings. The left portion of the library/museum complex was the original home of the library, and was constructed in the early 1900s. It has some elements of the Greek Revival style, specifically the columns and long windows, however its relative simplicity of lines is more consistent with the Arts and Crafts movement. The far most right portion of the building was built in 1917 to house the APM's collection. It is a square brick building with five square windows on the front. The original entry door was converted into a large window when the buildings were joined in the 1980s.

Although the library retains its original front door, the only way to enter the building is to walk up several small flights of stone stairs, or to take the prodigious accessibility ramp. The front doorway has a large sign that reads 'Welcome to Abel Public Library'. A smaller sign reads 'Abel Public Museum' with an arrow pointing down and to the left. The library and museum's hours are also clearly posted. When visitors go through the entry, they immediately encounter the library's front desk. To the left is a carpeted flight of stairs with a sign reading 'Abel Public Museum downstairs' prominently displayed. After descending the stairs, one simply has to turn left and walk through a large wooden door with the museum's hours posted on it.

Visitors are greeted by the sound of an electronic doorbell and one of the museum's staff members, in that order. The museum has one full time staff member--the director, Angela. There are two part time staff members as well: Louise is the assistant director and archivist, and Janet is responsible for educational programming. As the director, Angela is the staff member who makes the majority of the decisions about the curatorial practices of the institution. She designs and installs almost all of the Abel Public Museum's exhibits. Both temporary and permanent exhibits comprise the museum's typical layout, and there is also an interactive children's area.

The central mission of the museum is to educate the people of Abel, and the surrounding areas, about local and natural history. While the museum has a sizable collection of historic artifacts and biological specimens, it also has a large quantity of Native American artifacts. Many of these objects were donated by citizens of Abel, and many of these objects are archaeological or historical items of material culture made by the Native groups originally inhabiting the greater Abel area. The APM typically has at least one exhibit dedicated to the history and culture of Native groups in the area. The Native American exhibit space is small (Figure 4.1). There is a corner area with several cases that explore Native American history. The first of these cases is divided into three distinct sections. Moving left to right, the first portion of the case is dedicated to some of the daily tasks of Native Americans (Figure 4.2). There are multiple examples of beadwork and other handicrafts in the middle section of the case. Finally, the far right side of the case examines the tribes of Wisconsin, with specific emphasis on their ancestral geographic areas. This portion of the case also contains multiple black and white photographs of Native Americans.

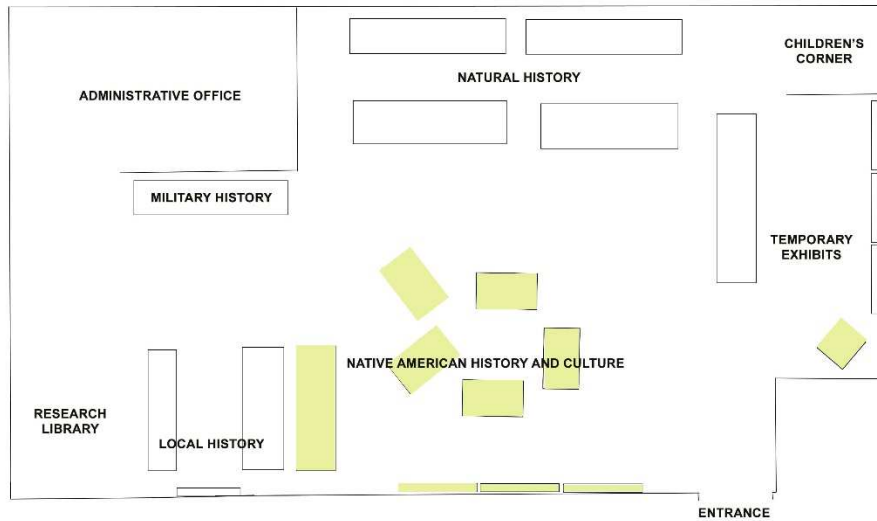


Figure 4.1. Rough layout of Abel Public Museum with the Native American exhibits highlighted in yellow (approximately 25-35% of total exhibit space).

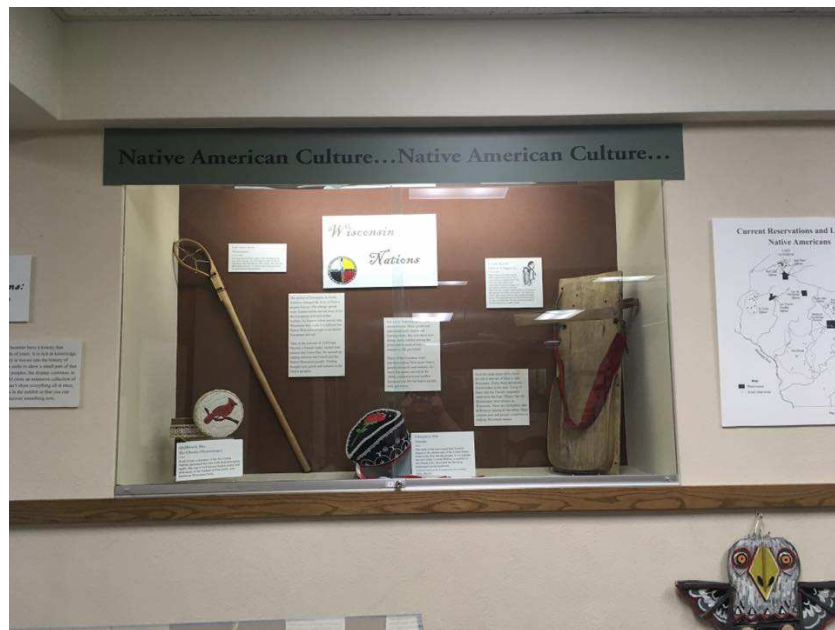


Figure 4.2. Primary display case from the Native American exhibit at the Abel Public Museum.

Immediately to the right of these cases is a large standing case that displays Plains tribal regalia collected by one of the museum's founders (Figure 4.3). Further right in the case is a display about the Fur Trade, including items such as pipes, tomahawks and trade beads. There

are several free-standing cases in this area that focus on Native American history and culture. One of these cases contains a display that is rotated fairly frequently, although it has traditionally showcased items that were donated by a particularly wealthy and important donor. The most recent exhibit was about bannerstones and their role within the archaeological record. Bannerstones are artifacts usually associated with the Native American tribes of the Eastern United States. They are the subject of some debate amongst archaeologists since their form, while very consistent, does not seem to have an immediate modern counterpart (Kinsella 1975; Sassaman and Randall 2007). The exhibit focuses on possible uses for bannerstones and examines how archaeologists interrogate ways of knowing about the past. The exhibit also has an additional two cases on either side of the exhibit space, creating a meandering and relaxed feel to the space. One case details the Ho-Chunk origin story for a particular species of duck that is native to the area. Another case examines the diet of local Native American communities with specific emphasis placed on wild rice and the cultivation of a variety of plants. The space is well-lit and small, though not claustrophobic. The labels are well-written and engaging; providing straightforward explanations. Angela was responsible for constructing and installing the exhibits about five years ago. Before that time, those cases were dedicated to natural history and zoological collections.

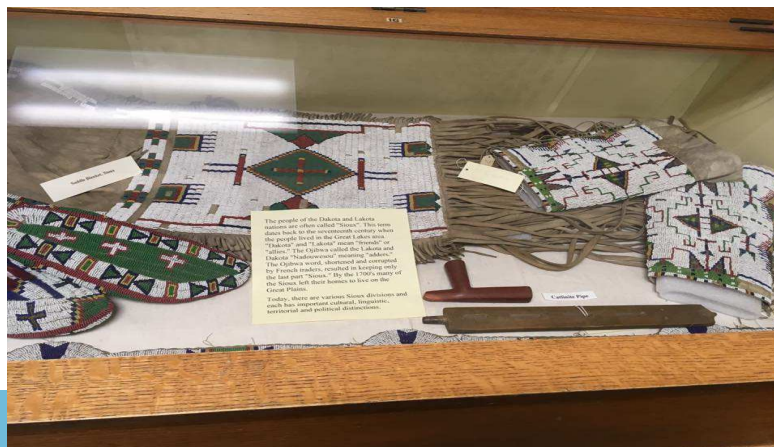


Figure 4.3. Case from the Abel Public Museum focusing on Plains Native American objects.

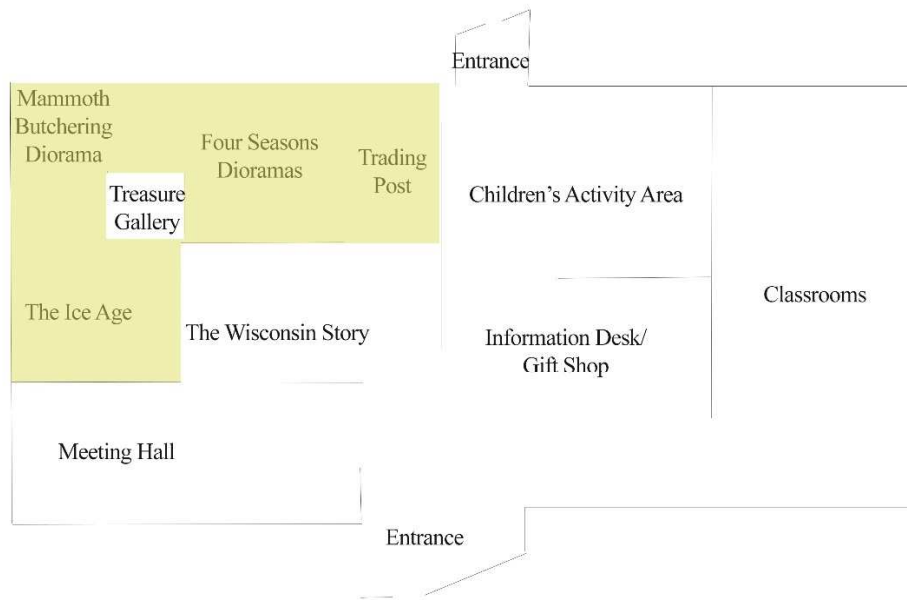
### *The Pineville Public Museum*

The Pineville Public Museum (PPM) is located in one of Wisconsin's largest cities. It has a population of nearly 100,000 people. Although Pineville is more ethnically diverse than many Wisconsin cities, the population is still 77% White. Latinxs are the next largest demographic, with about 16% of the population represented. Black individuals comprise about 10% of the population, and the remaining 4% is composed of people from other ethnic or multiple ethnic backgrounds. About 22% of the population age 25 and over have a Bachelor's degree, which is slightly lower than the state average of 27%. The average household income is about \$48,000 and about 19% of people live below the poverty level, indicating that Pineville is slightly poorer than the rest of the state. As with most Wisconsin cities, it was originally a major center for manufacturing (United States Census Bureau). However, many companies subsequently outsourced in the 1980s and 1990s, leaving Pineville economically depressed. Recent revitalization efforts have included an increased municipal emphasis on tourism. As a result, the City of Pineville built several new museums and other tourist attractions in the downtown area. The PPM opened in 2000, and other museums opened in the years that followed. These include a museum dedicated to geology and dinosaurs, and a museum dedicated to the Civil War.

The Pineville Public Museum is a visually striking building with a modern aesthetic inspired by the glaciers that shaped the area's distinctive geological features. The front entrance is made of multiple large panes of glass that terminate in a slight arch. The rest of the building is made of a tawny colored sandstone with large ground floor windows and "Pineville Public Museum" written in large block letters on the top left portion of the sandstone facade. Although

the main entry and foyer area extend past the roof of the rest of the building, the PPM has two floors of exhibit space. Inside the foyer is the visually striking lobby area, which has a cathedral ceiling and cobblestone walls. The gift shop is to the right of the main entrance, and the galleries are to the left. Near the first floor galleries are the stairs to the second floor galleries.

The Pineville Public Museum has permanent dioramas on the first floor and rotating exhibits on the second. The exhibits on the first floor, called “The Wisconsin Story”, direct visitors through a history of the area, beginning with the evolution of single celled organisms. This continues onward through time and mentions dinosaurs and early mammals of North America. Finally, it takes the visitor on a path through the first Native peoples who settled the area, beginning with the Pre- Clovis sites in the area and continuing through early European contact with the Fur Trade. The portion of the exhibit of most interest to this project is the section that examines traditional indigenous ways of life during varying seasons. In this particular exhibit, there are multiple figures engaging in seasonal tasks. This, and the other portions of the exhibit focusing on Native perspectives, were conceptualized and designed in conjunction with the Forest County Potawatomi. All of the exhibits were installed in 2000, when the museum was first built. However, they are routinely updated and maintained (Figure 4.4).



*Figure 4.4.* Rough layout of Pineville Public Museum’s first floor with Native American exhibit areas highlighted in yellow (approximately 75-80% of total exhibit space).

The entire gallery feels very deliberately designed; there is a very clear linear and spatial path that visitors are expected to take. However, once they reach the ‘four seasons display’ as it is colloquially known by staff, the exhibit space becomes more open. Given the cyclical nature of the seasons, this particular format was chosen deliberately, however, several staff members have expressed concern about whether or not it makes Native American lifeways appear too static or predictable. More specifically, the exhibit focuses on the seasonal division of labor for given tribes. However, the exhibit itself lacks any real discussion of how life for Native peoples may have changed before European contact. It creates and perpetuates a false dichotomy of ‘before’ and ‘after’ contact and ignores archaeological evidence and oral traditions that include complex interactions between tribes (Buffalohead 1983). While hunter-gatherer societies undoubtedly lived according to the natural resources available in a given season, several staff

members are concerned that the exhibit does not provide enough critical examination of the complexity and richness of Native American life.

The space incorporates different levels of lighting, depending on the diorama. There are four main dioramas representing each season. The winter season is a quiet scene showing a woman and a man inside of a domestic space. The woman is listening to the man tell a story (4.5). The spring scene depicts a male figure ice fishing with a spear (4.6). There are also female and child figures in the background gathering plants. The season of summer features multiple female figures gathering plants as well as socializing (4.7). Finally, autumn features a seated female figurine next to multiple baskets of acorns, nuts, and other fruit. She looks on as a child processes wild rice (4.8). Although it is not initially clear what gender the child is intended to be, the museum's director has always thought of the figure as male because it was based on a specific photograph of a Native American boy processing wild rice using this particular method.



*Figure 4.5.* A woman listens as a man tells a story in the Winter section of the Four Seasons exhibit at the Pineville Public Museum.





*Figure 4.6.* A man spearfishing in the Spring section of the Four Seasons exhibit at the Pineville Public Museum.



*Figure 4.7.* Two women gathering plants and talking in the Summer section of the Four Seasons exhibit at the Pineville Public Museum.



Figure 4.8. A woman watches and shells nuts as a young boy processes wild rice in the Autumn section of the Four Seasons exhibit at the Pineville Public Museum.

### *The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History is located in one of Wisconsin's largest cities. It has a population of almost 600,000 people. Additionally, the city is ethnically diverse with an estimated 40% of its residents identifying as Black. White individuals are about 37%, Latinx people are about 17% of the population, and Native American individuals were about 0.5% of the population. This compares with statewide averages of 6.3%, 83.3%, 5.9%, and 1.0%, respectively. As it is a large city, there are diverse educational and career opportunities for the population. Approximately 22% of the city's population has a Bachelor's degree, which is also below the state average. However, the city is also known for having pervasive issues with crime and poverty. The average household income is about \$35,000, and close to 30% of the population lives under the poverty line (The United States Census Bureau).

The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History was founded in the 1880s and has become one of Wisconsin's most widely recognized museums. It has collections from around the world and exhibits that focus on natural history, geology, world history, anthropology, and local history. The building is a multilevel structure made from yellowish concrete with a white and

grey marble facade. Its design elements are overall reminiscent of the Brutalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The main exhibit areas comprise three floors, and visitors must climb stairs or take the elevator to reach the first floor of exhibits, passing the museum’s ground floor amenities in the process. The first floor focuses on natural history, local history, and European history. The second floor highlights past and present Native American culture (Figure 4.9).

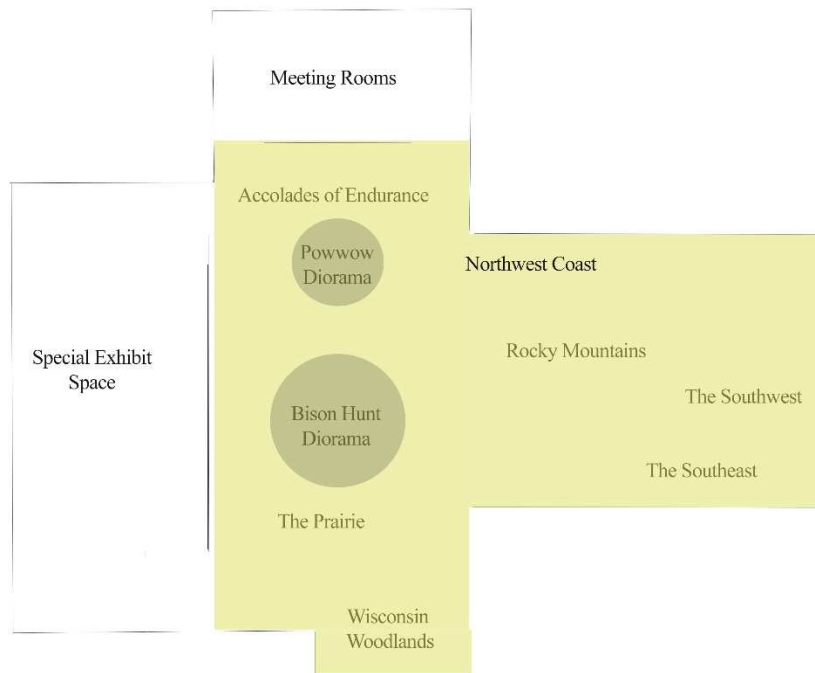


Figure 4.9. Rough layout of the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History third floor floorplan with Native American exhibit areas highlighted in yellow (approximately 80-85% of total exhibit space on this floor).

A significant portion of the Native American exhibits were most recently updated in the early 1990s. This work was undertaken in conjunction with many of the state’s indigenous populations. The title of this exhibit is “Accolades of Endurance” and it focuses on Native American history and culture especially in the context of a history of oppression and genocide. Central to “Accolades of Endurance” is a large diorama of a Powwow (Figure 4.10). It features multiple dancers in traditional regalia on a rotating platform that mimics common circular dance steps. Each of the figures is based on life casts of Native individuals from the state of Wisconsin.

There are also mannequins of several drummers and an announcer. An audio loop of a Powwow celebration from the 1990s plays through the gallery sound system. This powwow diorama is typically the first thing visitors see when they exit the escalators to the building's second floor. My earliest childhood memory of a museum is coming up the escalator and seeing this huge spinning wheel of colorful figures and hearing tribal chants and drums.



Figure 4.10. A portion of the Powwow diorama at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History.

The circular nature of the exhibit, combined with multiple exits highlights the nonlinear nature of “Accolades of Endurance”. Around the central powwow diorama are other exhibit components that highlight the history and contributions of Native Americans. These include sections titled “The First Americans”, “The European Presence”, “Myth of the Vanishing Indian”, and “A Fateful Encounter”. “The First Americans” discusses early archaeological evidence for a Native American presence in Wisconsin. It makes mention of specific sites and cultures that are significant to the state’s history. “A Fateful Encounter” focuses on the period of European contact. In addition to the discussion of the negative consequence of European contact, the exhibit highlights the contribution of Native Americans to current American culture. It focuses, in particular, on Native American domestication of plants and animals. “The European Presence” explores the history of interaction between Native Americans and European settlers.

While the Fur Trade is mentioned, there is also emphasis placed on how Native Americans were disenfranchised by Europeans (Figure 4.11). “Myth of the Vanishing Indian” outlines how Europeans drove Native Americans from their homelands and how, despite this, there are still Native Americans alive today. In addition to these sections, there are several display cases that focus on Native American history in more modern contexts. This includes sections about federal policies and the contribution of Native Americans to modern foods, medicines and technologies. Additional sections recount the forced movement of Native Americans to reservations, the fight for Native Civil Rights, and Native American participation in various wars. Finally, there are three videos that feature Native American individuals who were alive at the time of the exhibit installation telling autobiographical stories about their history, culture, and identity.

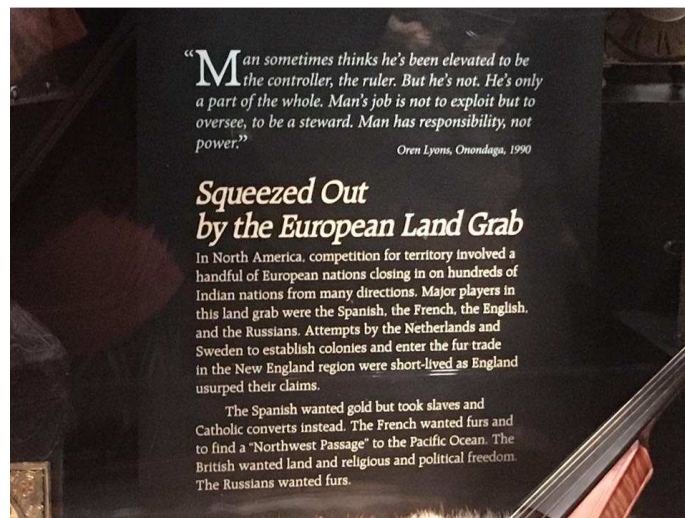


Figure 4.11. Example of label from the Accolades of Endurance exhibit at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History.

One of the most visually compelling exhibit components in “Accolades of Endurance” is the Bison Hunt diorama (Figure 4.12). It depicts two Native American men riding horses and spearing taxidermy bison. They are surrounded by a sparsely vegetated Plains landscape, including realistic plants and other taxidermy fauna. A bronze plaque next to the diorama refers

to it as “Crow Indian Bison Hunt”. It discusses how several men associated with the museum went to Oklahoma in the 1960s to “collect specimens and conduct field studies”. After five years, the diorama debuted to the public. At that time, it was considered to be one of the largest dioramas in the world. In addition to the dynamic poses of the people and animals, it also features a soundtrack and an interactive snake that rattles with the press of a button. In front of the diorama is a miniature diorama that depicts a similar bison hunt. However, in this version, multiple men run the bison off of a cliff in what is known as a jump kill with other Native American figures—primarily women and children—waiting below to quickly butcher them with stone tools. The juxtaposition of these two dioramas showing how bison hunts changed with the introduction of the horse. The Bison Hunt and the subsequent portions of the Native American exhibits discussed in this chapter are all examples of exhibits that were developed and installed prior to “Accolades of Endurance” in the 1990s.



Figure 4.12. The Bison Hunt diorama at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History

Behind the Bison Hunt diorama is a Blackfoot teepee and several murals depicting Plains life. This organically flows into The Prairie exhibit. This exhibit has a miniature of a Plains camp, along with information about the Plains way of life. There are also multiple historic photographs that feature Native American Plains people. Another miniature shows a Mandan village scene, focusing on two men playing chunky, a game involving throwing spears at a moving stone disc. Labels in the area talk about many aspects of Plains cultures, including dances and other rituals. Along with these depictions of daily life, several handicrafts are also displayed. Multiple examples of Plains beadwork and weaving can be seen as well.

If one follows the organic layout of the museum's floorplan, the visitor next meanders through the Wisconsin Woodlands exhibit, which features several dioramas of Wisconsin plant and animal life. However, humans do not appear again in the exhibits until later. The next major portrayal of Native Americans is a village scene of the Menominee tribe. In this diorama, several Native American figures can be seen in both the background and foreground of the scene. The trees in the diorama indicate that the events take place in fall. In the immediate foreground are two figures. A man and a woman speak (Figure 4.13). The man is threshing wild rice. He wears a leather loincloth, and his hair is tied into two braids. The woman next to him is carrying a basket and smiling. Her hair is plaited and she wears a leather dress with short sleeves that falls to just below her knee. Propped against one of the houses is an infant strapped to a cradleboard. On the other side of the dwelling is an older man who is sitting on the ground and talking to a second woman inside the house while working with a tone tool. Both appear to be weaving baskets or engaging in some other kind of handicraft. The older man has greying hair that is tied in two braids. He wears more ornately decorated clothing with beadwork and fringe. It is difficult to see much detail of the woman in the house, other than the baskets in front of her. She appears to

have greying black hair and a fringed leather outfit. Her gaze is downward as she is in the process of weaving a basket. The label discusses the process of harvesting wild rice. It also mentions that wild rice is popular with “the Wisconsin Indians” as well as “the white man”. The label goes on to point out several of the figures in the scene and briefly explain what they are doing.



*Figure 4.13.* A man and woman speak in the Wisconsin Woodlands exhibit at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History.

The next major exhibit focuses on Wisconsin archaeology. There are multiple sections of this exhibit that include artifacts from various places in Wisconsin. Most of them are organized by type of artifact, for example, a large display of projectile points is the first portion of the exhibit that most viewers see. A brief introduction is provided by the associated label, and points are organized by type. Included in these groupings are time and cultural period of production, and where they can be found. Below these points is more information about the manufacturing of projectile points, including diagrams of how to flint knap. Another section of labels focuses on answering common questions related to Wisconsin archaeology. Each portion of label asks a question, such as “Are the American Indians of Wisconsin’s past related to the American Indians who live here today?” or “Do archaeologists find things related to early European settlers?”.



Below each of these questions is an answer in the form of a paragraph and possibly some associated artifacts.

This portion of the exhibit organically flows into the beginning of the next exhibit, which details the material culture of the Woodlands tribes of Wisconsin. As with previous sections of the museum, many of the cases here are organized by type of artifact. There are sections for weaving, birchbark, woodwork, quillwork, and beadwork. The weaving case contains several Woodlands baskets and other textiles as well as raw materials utilized in weaving. The birchbark section features multiple birchbark containers of varying size and shape. It includes information about how the containers were made and how birchbark was utilized in other contexts. The woodwork case included elaborately decorated and more utilitarian pieces of woodwork such as spoons, plates, and bowls. The portion of the exhibit devoted to quillwork includes multiple examples of elaborately decorated boxes and personal accessories including basic information about how quillwork was done. The only section to feature a human figure is the section about beadwork. This portion of the exhibit discusses two kinds of beading and embroidery. It includes multiple examples of beaded items, including a fringed jacket and a decorated pipe. Next to the beadwork is a Native American female figure. She is wearing a long dress with elaborate applique work on the sleeves. She has several strands of beads around her neck and coins stitched to the bodice of her dress. The figure is placed in a slightly elevated position and is looking downward. One of the visual elements that links the cases in this exhibit is the presence of artificial birch trees. This creates the kind of visual rhyming that Bünz discusses in her examination of exhibits about Scandinavian women (2012:107-108), and it helps the viewer establish that these artifacts are all examples of Woodland tribes handicrafts.

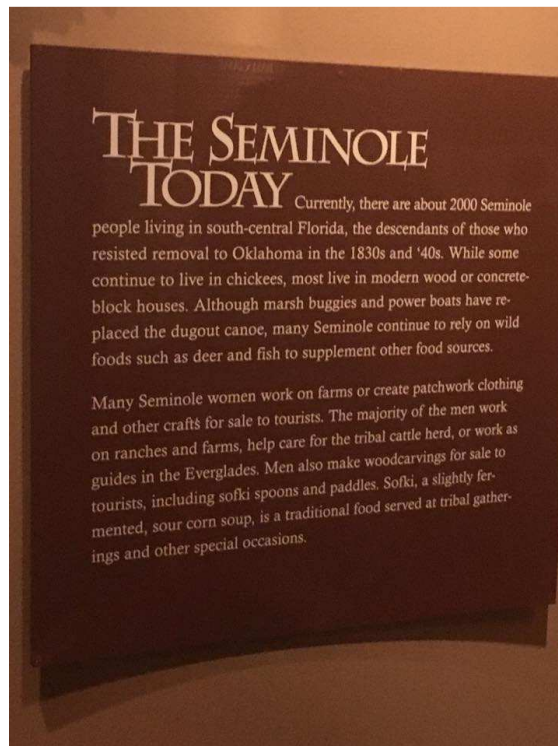
Interspersed with the cases and exhibit portions that discuss Native tribes in North America are wildlife and taxidermy dioramas. This trend continues through the rest of the exhibits dedicated to the Northeastern tribes. One of the tribes that the exhibit focuses extensively on is the Iroquois. Given that the Iroquois Confederation was such a large presence in the Northeastern United States, this is not surprising. There are several cases devoted to Iroquois history and ways of life. This includes information about food preparation and farming. Another nearby case discusses basket weaving and juxtaposes this with information about the role of Iroquois women and their attire. This features a figurine of an Iroquois woman dressed in tribal regalia. A companion to this case focuses on the role of men in Iroquois society. A seated male figure is posed among several hunting implements, dishes, and other wooden objects. He is smoking a pipe (Figure 4.14). A label next to this exhibit discusses the presence of the Iroquois in Wisconsin. Again, these cases are surrounded by multiple wildlife dioramas.



*Figure 4.14.* A seated Iroquois man smokes a pipe in the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History's Native American exhibits.

A circuitous path through the exhibits winds from the Northeast to the Southeast. Again, the visitor sees multiple taxidermy dioramas in conjunction with several cases devoted to the Native American tribes of the American Southeast. One of the first portions of this exhibit is a case titled "Prehistoric Indians of the Southeast". This includes information about the first people living in the Southeast as well as artifacts that are displayed in a way meant to simulate the environment of a chickee, a platform shelter of tribes who live in the Everglades (Dilley 2015). Included in this exhibit is a label depicting the ancestral homeland of Southeast tribes and discussing the Trail of Tears. Another large label is located nearby that discusses some of the similarities of the tribes including agricultural practices, dwelling structures, and the negative impact of European contact. While the Northeastern portion of the exhibits focuses predominantly on the Iroquois, the Southeastern exhibits mainly highlight the Seminole and the

Cherokee. An exhibit case contains a colorful outfit referred to as a “Seminole Woman’s Dress”. Adjacent to this is another label that focuses on general clothing of the Southeastern tribes. The case also contains several Seminole artifacts, mostly woodwork and woven baskets. Nearby is a large reproduction of a historical photograph with the caption “Seminole Indians from the Everglades, bride and groom”. Further along in the exhibit is a general discussion of “The Seminole Today” (Figure 4.15). Given that the exhibits were designed between the 1970s and the 1990s, this seems somewhat anachronistic. Further, it asserts the idea that there is a timeless ethnographic present, despite clear evidence to the contrary. The second major tribe discussed in the Southeastern portion of the exhibits is the Cherokee. There are several display cases devoted to this tribe, with particular attention paid to handicrafts such as pottery and basket making. In addition to the objects themselves, there are also multiple photographs that depict craftswomen making ceramics and baskets.



*Figure 4.15. “The Seminole Today” label at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

As of 2016, one of the temporary exhibits at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History is dedicated to games that were traditionally played by Native Americans. This small exhibit focuses on the history of these games and includes several artifacts such as lacrosse sticks and chunky stones. It also features carved dominoes and cribbage boards. Reproductions of historical photographs have been utilized to demonstrate who played these games and how they were played.

The next geographical region of the United States that the exhibits focus on is the American Southwest. One of the first aspects of the exhibit that visitors notice is the music here. Similar to the Powwow diorama, tribal music and chants play on a loop over the speaker system. Some of the music is a bit tinny and high pitched for a modern audience, and I have overheard several people snicker or refer to it as ‘weird’ or ‘annoying’. In addition to the music, visitors are first greeted by a bright orange label entitled “The Prehistoric Southwesterners” a secondary caption below it reads “The Desert Culture: The Basic Tradition”. This case contains ceramic and stone artifacts. Another label nearby discusses the importance of land and agriculture to the Pueblo tribes. The next component to the exhibit is a miniature diorama featuring village life at the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico. The miniature features Zuni people engaging in daily activities. In the foreground, two young boys play with tops. In the background, men relax or work on stone tools while women make pottery, bake, or carry firewood. The exhibit then begins to focus more closely on the Hopi tribe. One case discusses the rise of pottery making as tourist art during the twentieth century and describes how Hopi potters make ceramics. In addition to these labels, there are multiple photographs of Nampeo, a famous female potter, making ceramics. The photographs detail each step of the intricate process. There is also a room dedicated to Kachina

dolls and the Kachina ritual, including a miniature diorama of a kachina ceremony. Other cases in the Hopi and Navajo sections of the exhibit discuss textiles and weaving. One case includes a female figure wearing a Navajo blanket and carrying natural fibers used in basketmaking.

Nearby is a diorama of the inside of a dwelling, including a male figure descending or ascending a ladder in such a way that only his legs are visible to the average adult viewer. Several miniatures depicting Pueblo rituals and daily life are also adjacent, including labels that discuss particular aspects of those rituals. Continuing counterclockwise in the space are full-sized dioramas of Pueblo life, including a woman processing corn, a woman and young girl cooking, another woman tending a fire, and a man weaving.

The exhibits then focus on California and the Great Basin tribes. A miniature diorama entitled “Cremating the Dead” discusses the historical funerary practices of the Mojave tribe from Southern California. Its label indicates specific figures within the diorama and mentions that their actions are “traditional expressions of mourning”. The next miniature diorama focuses on the Pomo tribe and one of their seasonal rituals. An interior of a structure is shown with multiple male figures crouched in a dance. Then, the exhibit begins to focus more exclusively on the tribes of the Great Basin. A case with hunting and fishing artifacts discusses how the nomadic tribes of this area were “[s]eldom actually starving but equally seldom able to relax”. Another nearby case shows a male figure weaving baskets under a label that reads “The Basin: Precarious Survival Meant Simple Societies”. Adjacent to that are labels that discuss the technology of the Great Basin and the influence of neighboring Plains tribes. Additional labels about the Great Basin discuss subsistence patterns and the “Harmony of Man and Nature”.

Adjacent to the Great Basin exhibit is a small section devoted to the Rocky Mountains. While this includes some information about Native American peoples in the area, it mostly

focuses on the wildlife. Interestingly, however, there is a label about the Ghost Dance here. The Ghost Dance was originally believed by several tribes to be a way to unite Native Americans and to make White settlers leave. The label mentions that practice of the Ghost Dance stopped after the U.S. Cavalry massacred an estimated 300 members of the Lakota Sioux, the vast majority of them women and children. However, there have also been recent efforts to explore the Ghost Dances as being a revitalization movement (Mooney 1991; Kracht 1992; Kehoe 2006). It is possible for visitors to bypass the Rocky Mountains exhibit entirely, as the Great Basin exhibits transition into others focusing on the Northern Californian and Plateau tribes.

There is relatively little space dedicated to these groups, though one case does include an adult figurine of initially indeterminate gender bending over a bundle of reeds. The label next to the figurine is small and simply titled “Clothing”. If visitors read the label, they will likely make the inference that the figure is meant to represent an adult man. The rest of the case contains several woven baskets and traps. A nearby miniature diorama shows women processing food. There are significantly fewer depictions of men than women here, with only three male figures visible. One of the men is lounging under a lean-to shelter while a second walks towards several standing female figures. Finally, the third depiction of a male figure shows a man paddling a canoe in the background of the miniature. Next to the miniature diorama are two labels. The top label is titled “A Modoc Harvest” while the bottom reads “The Hunter’s Prize”. Another nearby miniature acts as a sort of visual transition between these tribes and those present in the Northwest Coast.

The exhibit focusing on the Northwest Coast tribes is a visually striking area with multiple full-sized and miniature dioramas. Visitors enter a simulated longhouse with cases placed on three of the four sides. Miniature dioramas depicting weaving and totem pole

construction are juxtaposed with those that feature ritual practices such as the “Kwakiutl Hamatsa Ceremony”<sup>3</sup>. Included in this area of the exhibits is a darkened case with the outline of a label just visible. As most visitors now have flashlights on their phones, an intrepid viewer can easily read the label. The label discusses the sacred ceremony including the now-controversial phrase “Cannibal dancer” (McDowell 1997). A large display of many carved wooden masks is central to this room, and dramatically backlit. Moving clockwise, the visitor then sees a full-sized diorama depicting a man, woman, and infant in a cradleboard. The female figure is butchering a fish and the male figure is repairing a fishing hook. There are several exhibit cases that feature Northwestern Coast tribes’ artifacts, such as nets and carved wooden boxes. Another case has a miniature diorama that depicts several male figures preparing to go fishing. Above it the label reads “Making a Living was Easy”. The exhibits on the second floor then wind around to the Powwow diorama, creating a large loop.

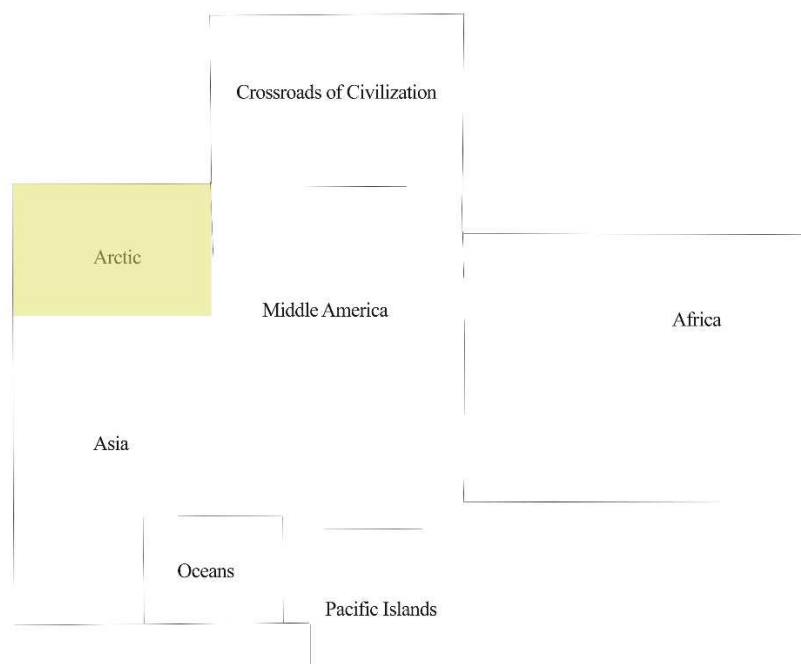
Unlike the other exhibits dedicated to the Native Americans of the continental United States, the archaeological and ethnographic materials associated with Arctic tribes are located on the third floor, closer to the Asian and Pacific Islands exhibits (Figure 4.16). However, there have historically been many Native groups living in northern Alaska, including several Inuit groups. The exhibit dedicated to these groups includes a label underneath a figure wearing heavy fur clothing. The label is titled “People of the Arctic”, and it provides some basic information about North American Indian Nations who historically inhabited the circumpolar regions. The first sentence reads “‘Eskimo’ means ‘raw-fish-eater’, but they call themselves ‘Inuit’, The People”. The label also mentions that the word ‘Eskimo’ is not actually what they call themselves. However, further exhibit labels seem to ignore this assertion, as indicated by

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<sup>3</sup> Although ‘Kwakiutl’ is used in this context, and has traditionally been utilized by anthropologists, ‘Kwakwaka’wakw’ is actually preferred by many individuals (Clifford 1997:132).



“Eskimo Clothes” and “Eskimo Seal Hunting”. A cross section of an igloo is displayed, including a man working leather, a woman nursing a child, and a small child playing with a puppy. Another full-sized diorama is next to it, featuring an Inuit man with a team of sled dogs and an Inuit woman and child standing nearby. Further along is another diorama where visitors can enter an igloo and see what the inside of one would have looked like. It includes several figures interspersed with ethnographic materials such as traps and cookware. Further along are dioramas such as “Making Prayers” and “The Yup’ik Qasgiq (community house)” that explore ritual practices of circumpolar peoples. Several nearby cases focus on subsistence patterns such as seal hunting and spearfishing while others focus on “Eskimo Art Today”. These cases include multiple carvings that Inuit artists have made in more recent years.



*Figure 4.16.* Rough layout of the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History third floor floorplan with Native American exhibit areas highlighted in yellow (approximately 20-25% of total exhibit space on this floor).

The other significant depiction of Native Americans is located on the first floor, close to the European village and local history exhibits. The first diorama, depicting the Fur Trade shows a Native American man at a trading post, while a woman and child wait in the nearby background. Two other men are inside the trading post, though it is difficult to determine their intended ethnicity given the interior's dim lighting. Another nearby diorama shows European and Native American interaction around the time of contact. A Native American man wearing a headdress points to something in the distance while a European man in a tricorn hat studies the object that the Native American man is pointing to (Figure 4.17). A second Native American man is also positioned in the foreground, with his back to the viewer.



*Figure 4.17.* An example of a diorama from the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History's exhibits about European contact and trade.

### *New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

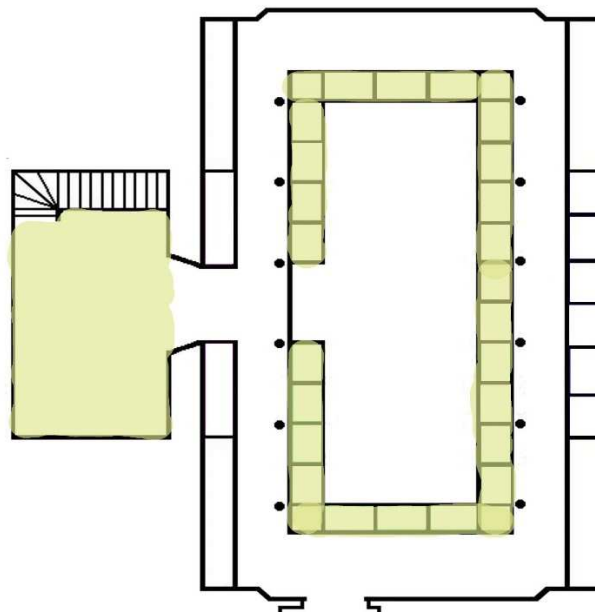
The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology (NCCMA) is a museum located in a small liberal arts college in Wisconsin. The surrounding community of New Canton is a mid-sized city in Wisconsin with a population of close to 40,000. Outside of the college, the town is

63.5% White, 17.1% Latinx, and 15% Black. Slightly under than 15% of the population over 25 has a Bachelor's degree. The median household income is about \$32,000 and about a quarter of the population lives under the poverty line (United States Census Bureau).

Despite these statistics, the overwhelming majority of the students at New Canton College are White and middle to upper middle class. The NCCMA was first built to help educate the undergraduate population about anthropology and natural science. The college's original collection was moved to its current location, a chapel commemorating soldiers who fought in the Civil War, in the late 1890s. Laboratory and classroom settings were added in the 1920s. In the 1970s, an academic building with more classrooms was added. The museum was renovated in the early 1990s, incorporating the new trend of visual storage. Visual storage was first conceptualized in the 1970s, as a way of exhibiting more objects and encouraging visitors to critically examine which objects were displayed and why (Booth 1998; Bohlen 2001).

The NCCMA's visual storage takes the form of a two-story large glass cube full of neatly arranged baskets and pottery. This currently houses various ethnographic and archaeological materials from North and South America. The space is visually impressive; small, neat labels indicate the culture that the objects belong to on a particular shelf. Otherwise, there are no labels in the case. The numerous LEDs illuminate the objects, and drawing the eye upward to fully appreciate the volume of the visible storage. There is a research lab in the center of the cube, and students, faculty, and staff often do research or informal presentations there. On one external wall of the room, there is a display dedicated to anthropology. In addition to explaining the subfields of anthropology, it also outlines its history at New Canton College. On the other side of the large visual storage area is an exhibit that highlights the museum's history at the college. It focuses on the NCCMA as a teaching institution, including information on museum studies best

practices such as accessioning and numbering objects. This exhibit discusses some of the courses offered at New Canton College in the Anthropology and Museum Studies departments, and it explores some of the previous donors, faculty, and staff who contributed significant donations or led important field schools in conjunction with these departments. There is an additional gallery off to the side of the main visual storage area. This gallery has been more frequently used for storage or as workspace for Museum Studies classes; however, exhibits are occasionally found within this area that frequently focus on specific time periods and events in New Canton College's history, including New Canton College alumni who have fought in various wars and the Civil Rights era at New Canton College (Figure 4.18).



*Figure 4.18.* New Canton College Museum of Anthropology first floor floorplan with Native American exhibit areas highlighted in yellow. (Approximately 85-90% of total exhibit space on this floor)<sup>4</sup>

The second floor of the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology is dedicated to temporary exhibits, many of which are curated by the students (Figure 4.19). Although these exhibits often feature Native American objects, they are more commonly centered around a

<sup>4</sup> This drawing, and the one of the NCCMA's second floor, were provided by Steve. I added the highlighting later.

particular theme. Recent exhibit topics have been about childrearing, identity formation, and water. Most of these exhibits utilize objects from diverse cultures rather than focusing on a particular culture group. However, the curator has indicated that he would like to expand his horizons a bit. Although student curation is fairly common, getting the local community involved in the museum's programming has always been a bit of a concern. Any community curation at New Canton involves the community of undergraduate students rather than the surrounding city. As a result, there has not been significant involvement of Native American groups in exhibit design at development at the museum.

## Upper Level

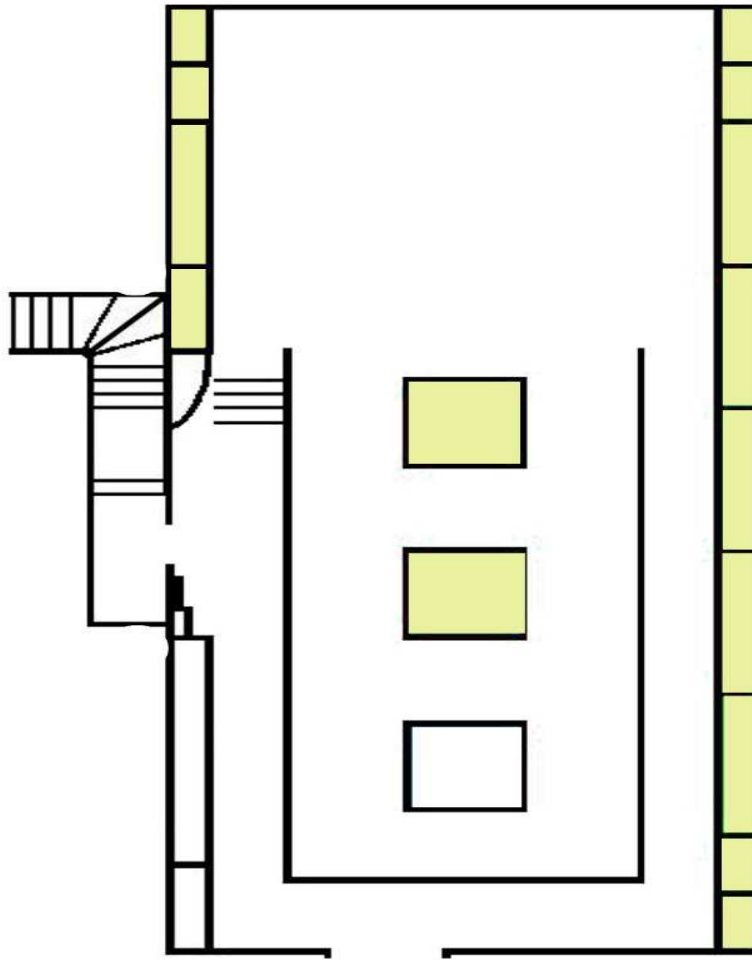


Figure 4.19. New Canton College Museum of Anthropology first floor floorplan with Native American exhibit areas highlighted in yellow. (Approximately 90-95% of total exhibit space on this floor)

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

### Introduction

This chapter focuses more specifically on the museum professionals that were interviewed for this project. First, it provides a brief overview of each person, including a discussion of his or her background. In order to examine how people's thoughts about representation directly impacted their individual curatorial philosophies, it was crucial to understand how their particular embodiment of multiple facets of identity might impact how they conceptualize factors such as race and gender. Next, this section explores how these museum professionals conceptualize several key topics. Each professional's views on gender, race, and community curation is examined in detail.

When examining institutional attitudes towards Intersectional representation, it is also crucial to consider those responsible for making curatorial decisions within museums. As such, a substantial portion of this study was dedicated to exploring the attitudes of museum professionals who were responsible for developing and implementing exhibits about Native Americans in the present day. However, it is crucial to understand that not all of these professionals designed all of the exhibits at their particular institution. This is especially true of the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History and the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology, as both institutions have exhibits that span several decades and that have not been updated for various reasons.

Of the four professionals interviewed, all identified as being White. Two of them were cisgendered men, while two were cisgendered women. This is relatively consistent with the racial makeup of the Museum Studies field, as a 2009 study indicates that approximately 79% of museum professionals are White (The American Association of Museums 2011; Figure 5.1).

Additionally, the gender composition is fairly consistent with the field in that half of the participants are female and half are male. Across the museum workforce, 52.5% of museum professionals are male and 47.5% are female (Ibid). The participants were between the ages of 40 and 65, which is a bit older than the median age of museum workers (Ibid). This study also examines both men and women in leadership and subordinate roles within museums. The Pineville Public Museum’s director, Tom, was one of the participants, as was Steve, a curator of education and exhibits from the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology. However, one of the female participants, Angela, is the director at the Abel Public Museum.

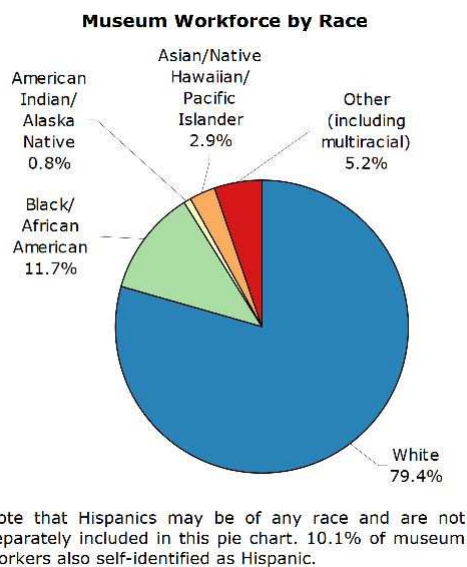


Figure 5.1. Graph from 2009 AAM study about demographic composition of museum field.

## Descriptions

*Angela: Director at the Abel Public Museum*

Angela is a woman of average height with medium length brown hair and bright blue eyes. She has almost girlish features and is prone to smiling. Angela frequently wears solid colored clothing in pastel or neutral hues. When she does wear jewelry, it is usually simple and complements her outfit. It is difficult to determine her age at first glance, however. I have always



gotten the impression that she appears to be much younger than she actually is, based on past conversations. She speaks at a moderate pace with the slightest hint of a Southern accent. Her speech pattern conveys confidence and intelligence without coming across as arrogant. Although her disposition is typically cheerful, it is neither boisterous nor unyielding.

Angela is the youngest of twelve children and has been interested in history and museums since she was in high school. When she was thirteen, she began volunteering at a local history museum. It was at that young age that she realized that she wanted to work in museums, specifically in collections. She has worked in a variety of institutions mostly doing a combination of collections care, curation, and administrative work. She has been the director at the Abel Public Museum for about five years. In Angela's opinion, one of the most important roles of a museum is to "care for collections" and "use them to inspire a love of history in future generations".

*Tom: Director at the Pineville Public Museum*

The museum's director and curator of exhibits, Tom, focused on incorporating the perspectives and stories of Native peoples. Tom is a somewhat short man in his 50s with thinning brown hair and a goatee. He wears a pair of wire rimmed glasses and usually has a bit of a smirk on his face. He is outgoing and jovial, but has a somewhat sarcastic sense of humor. He typically wears business clothing, especially when he is representing the museum. However, he gives off an air of informality that makes one feel at ease when speaking with him. He comes across as giving careful thought to how he answers questions, despite his penchant for joking.

Tom's original introduction to the field of museums was as a child when he attended a history museum while on a family trip to Germany. This inspired him to study history in college and archaeology in graduate school. After spending several years as a field archaeologist, he

started working in museums because they were “more stable” and still let him “play with cool [objects]”. He has spent a total of over 30 years at the Pineville Public Museum, acting as its director for the past five. Tom feels that museums provide invaluable opportunities to encourage future generations’ love of history.

*Natasha: Curator of Anthropology Collections at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

Natasha is the curator of collections for the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History’s Anthropology department. Although the department utilizes several adjunct curators from the nearby university, Natasha is responsible for the content of many of the more modern Native American exhibits in the museum. She is a smaller woman with striking, dark curly hair and blue eyes. Her voice is very even and calm in most circumstances. She projects an air of authority and confidence, especially when speaking about her chosen field. However, she does have a warm, nurturing side that comes across when speaking to her interns or students. Typically, Natasha wears comfortable yet professional looking clothing in a variety of jewel tones, including dynamically colored pashmina scarves during cooler months.

Natasha stated that reading “a book about Pompeii” as a child was what first cultivated her interest in history. From there, she volunteered at a number of museums and went on to study anthropology and museum studies in college and graduate school. She has worked at a variety of institutions across the country, and has held her position at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History for approximately 30 years. In addition to her view that museums act as crucial institutions of informal learning, she also considers them to be stewards of the past.

*Steve: Curator of Exhibits and Education at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

Steve is a tall, somewhat imposing man with a shaved head and a small gold earring in his right ear. He has brown eyes and severe looking salt and pepper brows. Steve wears glasses

for close vision and misplaces them with great frequency. He typically wears button-up shirts rolled up to his elbows. A tattoo of a green oak leaf is visible on his forearm. Despite his initially imposing presence, Steve is generally very easy-going and placid. The best way to change this, however, is to start talking about politics. Like most of the staff at New Canton College, Steve is a vehement liberal.

Unlike many of his peers, Steve's interest in working in the museum field came later in life. His background was originally in carpentry and set design. However, he discovered that "it wasn't really what he wanted," and decided to go back to school for Public History and Museum Studies. He had always been interested in history, but had never really considered how his skills in carpentry and construction could be paired with that. He has been the curator of exhibits and education at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology since 2008. Before that, he worked at another institution in Rockford, Illinois as the curator of exhibits. However, he liked the idea of working in a position where he was interacting with students and working "as an educator in multiple capacities: both with visiting groups and with students in the classroom". For Steve, one of the most important functions that museums serve is their ability to provide unique educational experiences for a variety of audiences.

### **Museum Professionals and Gender**

The concept of gender and how it influences museum professionals' individual curatorial philosophies was the area with the most diversity of opinions. While each of the museum professionals interviewed are cisgender, they have very different views about what their particular gender means to them. Some professionals thought about gender frequently, whereas others did not feel that their gender was a particularly good indicator of who they were as a person. Others acknowledged that gender was something they had largely taken for granted until

a particular person encouraged them to examine their preconceived notions. Responses about how gender impacted their curation choices also differed substantially, depending upon how important gender was to each individual. Additionally, there was a noticeable correlation between a person's willingness to relinquish curatorial authority and their eagerness to explore future curatorial projects that incorporate more gender diversity.

Of the four museum professionals interviewed, Angela was the participant whose gender identity was the most crucial to her sense of self. She stated that she was “very proud to be a woman”, and that it was “important to her”. Gender equality is very important to Angela, specifically providing women with the same opportunities as men. The concept of choice is very important to her, including the ability for women to choose whether or not they want to adhere to traditional gender roles. However, she still views gender as being largely male/female and acknowledged that she “didn't typically think about” gender nonconforming individuals, because “[she] hasn't really come across [them] before.” Both of the male participants had relatively similar views about their own gender. Tom admitted that he “definitely views gender as having a degree of fluidity”. He has twin daughters and feels that one is more “girly or traditionally feminine and the other is more androgynous, which has had him kind of “rethink the idea of gender being a binary”. Now, Tom views gender as being on a spectrum. One of the points that Steve discussed in his interview was how much his perceptions about gender have been challenged since he started working at the NCCMA. He stated that before his experiences interacting with students of diverse identities, he had the “privilege” of “not having to think about gender, on account of being a cis guy.” However, like Tom, his interactions with the people in his life have shaped his view that gender exists on a spectrum. As with Angela, Steve considers himself a feminist, however, he also champions the rights of gender nonconforming

individuals, possibly because he has had more interaction with them. Of the museum professionals surveyed, Natasha's gender was the least crucial to her sense of identity. She noted that when she was "talking about [herself], there were at least three or four things that come to mind before 'woman'". Gender has "never been that important to her", both in her conceptualization of herself and of others. Natasha feels that her roles as "mother, wife, and museum professional" are more critical to her sense of self than the idea of 'femaleness'. She also mentioned that she views people as an "end product" rather than just by their gender". She does recognize that other people view her as embodying particular social categories, but ultimately considers them to be more relevant to the way that others see her rather than how she sees herself.

Individual museum professionals' conceptualization of gender was highly contingent upon how they chose to examine gender within their own curatorial choices. For example, Angela stressed the need to emphasize the participation of women in significant historical events and to "not limit them to traditional gender roles". Tom expressed the need to rely on historical evidence or experience to determine how particular tribes might have conceptualized gender in the past. Steve admitted that the issue of gender is complex and something that he doesn't understand much about, so he tries to avoid making broad claims about gender roles or gender identities in his curation, especially when dealing with traditionally marginalized groups like Native Americans. Finally, Natasha said that she is less concerned about the genders portrayed in a particular exhibit, and more concerned with whether or not it is an accurate and effective exhibit.

At this juncture, it is prudent to acknowledge the impact that each curators' cisgendered perspective has on their curatorial depictions of gender. When discussing how they portray

gender in museums, almost all of them think about gender in very specific ways associated with cisgender indicators of gender. For example, all of the curators mentioned that physical attributes were an effective way to indicate gender. More specifically, they discussed markers like hair style and length, clothing, and body shape. Most of the museum professionals seemed hesitant, however, to use specific activities or behaviors as a direct marker of gender. Rather, their choice to have men doing one set of tasks and women doing another set of tasks was based on “photographs and other ethnographic sources”, according to Tom. Similarly, the inclusion, or lack thereof, of gender nonconforming individuals was also framed by several curators as being contingent upon ethnographic and historic data. For example, when asked, all of the curators expressed a willingness to incorporate exhibits or exhibit components that featured characters who were gender nonconforming. However, none of them had curated these types of exhibits in the past. When asked why, both Tom and Natasha indicated a lack of data. Tom in particular said, “the fact is that there isn’t really any data that shows that this particular tribe had two-spirited people, even if it was in other tribes in the area, so it wouldn’t have been appropriate to include.” Additionally, Natasha mentioned that while she would “love to tell [the story of gender nonconforming Native people]”, it was important “to realize that not every topic is a good exhibit.” Angela also admitted that she had not incorporated gender nonconforming individuals in her exhibits for several reasons. First, she mentioned that she “didn’t know much about people who didn’t fall into either [the male or female] category”. She also discussed issues of scope and scale. Since the Abel Public Museum is a small institution, there is a limited amount of space in which to explore complex topics. The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology is also small, but the major difference between the two institutions is their respective audiences. Many people who go to the Abel Public Museum have not been exposed to gender expressions that fall

outside the range of the traditional female/male dichotomy. In contrast, most of the students and staff of the NCC community have some experience with gender nonconforming individuals. Because of this, their frame of reference is different. Therefore, according to Angela, it is often easier for exhibits at the NCCMA to explore particular topics. Angela's discomfort with curating gender nonconforming perspectives is also likely due to her own lack of exposure. Steve has had the broadest exposure to gender and sexual minorities, so he is the most enthusiastic about including their perspectives in curatorial decisions. However, his position has also enabled him to think critically about gender and how it is depicted in museums. In particular, his girlfriend (who is an archaeologist) has encouraged him to reconceptualize his ideas about how Native Americans and other peoples have navigated gender. He stated that gender roles as they are portrayed in museums are often inaccurate or fail to tell the whole story. As an example, he mentioned that "it doesn't make sense that men would have been the only ones to make tools. If a woman was processing a hide and her knife broke, she wouldn't wait for her husband or whoever to come home from hunting so that he could quick knap her a new one." This attitude has informed Steve's curation practices in that he attempts to show male and female characters engaging in nontraditional gender roles in addition to the possibility of incorporating more voices of diverse genders in future exhibits.

### **Museum Professionals and Race**

Each of the museum professionals surveyed identified as White. However, when asked what ethnicity they identified as, they all elaborated further. All of them were able to list multiple countries of origin for their ancestors. Many of them also seemed to sort of downplay the fact that they were White. They often mentioned it offhandedly, or as though this was an obvious observation. This seems to indicate that the most of the White museum professionals interviewed

did not think about their race with any particular frequency. This is most likely because Whiteness is often seen as the default embodiment of particular racial experiences. While this racial identity does not preclude them from developing meaningful and appropriate exhibits focused on Native American identity, it does indicate that they are approaching the concept of race from a dramatically different perspective. More specifically, the curators' Whiteness has given them the privilege of not having to confront racism on a regular basis. This, in turn, means that they have had to reflect less critically on what race means. For Steve, Tom, and Angela, this also meant a certain degree of discomfort when curating exhibits about people who are from a different racial or cultural background.

Each of the museum professionals felt a degree of moral responsibility for their institution's representation of other races and cultures. However, they differed in their views about which cultures required the most consideration. Natasha, for example, felt that all cultures required the same amount of attention in order to ensure that representation was cross-culturally egalitarian. However, she acknowledged that different cultures required different curatorial strategies in order to encourage accurate representation. In contrast, Steve thought that traditionally marginalized cultures required more attention and care in curation. He felt that it was crucial for more resources to be dedicated to telling the story of Native Americans and other groups due to "their history of oppression and erasure".

Natasha indicated that she felt as though Native Americans "didn't play the race card" as much as White museum professionals tended to believe. She felt that "treating them like people is more important than trying to apologize for what happened in the past." Natasha elaborated on this point, saying:

There were people at the beginning of NAGPRA and a lot of intense Native collaboration that would bend over backwards to do whatever for Native peoples because they had all



this guilt because [Native Americans] were persecuted and eliminated and put on reservations. I see first of all, going from present forward, the relationships that I am making are from today, not from 200 years ago. I recognize that is part of anybody's history, but I see it as we are on equal footing starting today. And I see it almost as a business arrangement because that's often how they approach it.

For Natasha, it is more important to treat Native groups as being “fully empowered now to make decisions on behalf of themselves” rather than being patronizing or pitying them. While Natasha acknowledges the importance of recognizing the history of oppression that Native Americans have faced, she ultimately felt that these atrocities did not define them. This, however, stands in direct contrast to what other scholars have written, including Lonetree's assertion that centralizing the narrative of genocide is crucial to the decolonization process (2012). In addition to formulating this opinion based on the interactions Natasha has had with multiple Native individuals, she also reflected about her own personal history:

I'm not Jewish, but both [sides of my family] are heavily Jewish. And being Eastern European, my family was very persecuted. My grandfather and his cousin were the only two survivors of a pogrom at seventeen because they were out hunting. When they came back to their Russian village, everyone they knew [had been killed]. I have relatives who were killed in the Holocaust. So coming from this, there is some connection to me from my past as it is for their past. That's saying 'I understand where you're coming from. I get that as being a descendant of a tortured people.

Tom and Angela felt somewhat similarly to Natasha, and all three acknowledged that, while there had been Native violence directed towards White settlers, the vast majority of conflicts stemmed from White people attempting to drive Native Americans off of their land. Steve also felt that race, and a history of White complicity in violence against Native peoples was one of the major reasons that there was such a strong pushback against more traditional curatorial methods. He also noted some of his concerns about the depiction of Native Americans in past museum exhibits at the NCCMA. Specifically, he discussed the murals on the second floor, stating:

Our, of course, real permeant exhibit [about Native Americans] are the murals. We use those extensively to teach about the history of anthropology and museum representation because they are so rife with these [problematic] 1920s era stereotypes. And, so I always talk about that early twentieth century ambivalence towards Native American nations that, ‘we’re sad that they’re supposedly going away because they were once these noble savages that were uncorrupted by our Western civilization, but at the same time, of course, they’re murderous barbarians who impeded manifest destiny and Western progress’. And you can see that in [these murals]. There’s this incredible gendered division of labor and everyone is really hardy because it’s fall, but nobody’s wearing a shirt. And then there’s [the mural depicting the Apache] where these fierce warriors are charging on horses out of the canvas. I always point to those two and say ‘Right here. This is the 1920s and 1930s view of The Native American.

Tom obviously acknowledged the need to be multivocal and to let Native Americans participate and tell their own stories, but while he viewed race as a “cultural construct”, he did not feel that completely relinquishing curatorial authority was an appropriate solution. Angela agreed with Tom, and she mentioned that the logical conclusion of such a project would be that “[museum professionals] could only curate exhibits about people who looked like [them]”.

This was a common concern, especially since the majority of museum professionals outside of this study are also White (American Association of Museums: 2011). Obviously, if White curators were limited to only curating exhibits about White individuals, then museums would likely include no significant mentions of Native Americans or other Peoples of Color. If the end goal of community curation is to fight against erasure and misrepresentation in a museum context, then this is both damaging and unrealistic. However, the museum professionals interviewed acknowledge that those who support community curation raise some incredibly significant concerns about how Eurocentric curatorial methodologies have shaped the museum field.

### **Museum Professionals and Community Curation**

One of the aspects of Native American representation that all the museum professionals agreed on was the unique challenges involved in curating Native American exhibits. Each one

highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity to issues like the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or the depiction of specific rituals. When asked how this differed from curating exhibits about European Americans, Angela and Steve both mentioned that they did feel “more comfortable” curating exhibits about European Americans, especially if it was a group that they shared a specific heritage with. Angela, however, further clarified, “It’s not that I’m not comfortable curating an exhibit about Native Americans...I’m definitely more comfortable [with it] than I used to be. But I think it’s a lot easier when you have a personal connection to whatever you’re curating. And I’ve learned not to assume[...]because there are a lot of cultural differences.” Tom felt similarly, noting that “it’s easier with Euro-Americans because there aren’t as many sensitive topics like ceremony, [and there] isn’t as much at stake if you get it wrong.”

Despite this concern about portraying Native Americans in a sensitive and appropriate way, each of the curators who have worked with Native groups have had positive experiences. When asked about Native participation and response to the exhibits at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History, Natasha stated that they have been “overwhelmingly positive”. She also mentioned that she felt that there was a level of “mutual respect” that allowed for them to “have differences of opinion or disagreements”, but ultimately reach a compromise about exhibit content and Native American representation. She mentioned that the fact that she is White has never seemed to be much of an issue with Native groups, because they appreciate her willingness to have a dialogue with them. Natasha ultimately concluded, “[c]ollaboration is the hardest thing you’re ever going to do, but the product is richer.” Tom said that he feels that the Native peoples that the institution has worked with have been “grateful [...] because it hasn’t always been done right in the past and they appreciate those who [take the time to] do it right.” As with Natasha, he

felt that the tribal representatives involved in exhibit design consultations have provided valuable feedback and been happy to engage in a dialogue with him. One of the anecdotes he recounted was about something that he was asked to remove from the exhibit plan during its initial development phase. When Tom presented a sketch of the background murals for the dioramas, he was told by tribal members that a particular section depicted a ritual practice that was supposed to be sacred and not known about by those outside of the tribe. As a result, Tom changed the image to depict a less sensitive ritual. He said that that was “the only real concern that the tribal leaders had”, and he was otherwise allowed to curate the exhibit as he saw fit. Angela also acknowledged how helpful tribal leaders have been when she has been curating exhibits about Native Americans. While Steve has had fewer opportunities to work with Native groups in his current position, he reads extensively about curatorial theory. He also mentioned that he felt that community curation is extremely valuable and important for modern museum professionals.

Of the participants interviewed, Steve was the most vocally supportive of community involvement in the curation process. However, he also noted that some of his enthusiasm might partially stem from the community that he works with. Steve noted that the students of New Canton College are “very engaged and concerned with social justice and representation”. Since Steve also teaches courses in museum education and exhibit design at the college, he is an active participant in the New Canton College community. His curatorial choices are, then, an example of a kind of community curation. However, the nuances of Steve’s community-based curation are distinct for several reasons. First, because Steve is simultaneously teaching his students particular theoretical and practical curation methods. Second, because exhibits at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology typically focus on cultures outside the college.

Within the community of New Canton College, Steve's position as an educator elevates him to a relatively high social status; he has a degree of authority over his students. His curatorial work confers further prestige. Thus, when Steve acts as an educator, he encourages his students to think a certain way. This, in turn, influences their own ideas about museums and curation. While this pedagogic process does not directly replicate Steve's views in his students, it does result in them framing their personal curatorial philosophies in relation to his. Further, the issue of representation here is especially significant. The exhibits at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology rarely, if ever, focus on the history or culture of the college community. In contrast, they typically focus on particular themes or issues that can be explored with the aid of the college's extensive ethnographic and archaeological collections. This means that curation decisions do not have the same potential to damage the community's sense of self or portray its culture in a harmful way.

The concept of privilege becomes important here, as well. When community curation comes from a group within a position of historically inferior social privilege--especially a traditionally disenfranchised group within a multicultural society--the ways in which they curate their history is profoundly consequential. Since Native American groups operate from a position of inferior social capital due to Eurocentrism and colonialism, their situation is more dire. The New Canton College community operates from a position of relative social prestige even if individual members embody diverse intersections of identity. If the community is lax in how it portrays itself, the consequences are less severe. They have the privilege to have their mistakes overlooked or forgiven because, "there isn't as much at stake if [they] get it wrong."

Like Steve, Natasha also teaches museum studies classes about curation and exhibit design. However, her predominant function is as a staff member of the Wisconsin Museum of

Natural History. As such, her thoughts about bias are different in a number of significant ways. She is more comfortable with the idea that “institutions like museums can be unbiased and historically accurate, even when depicting other cultures.” Because of this, she is also less comfortable with relinquishing a sense of curatorial authority. While Natasha functions as a teacher like Steve, their institutions’ respective audiences have also shaped how they both feel about community curation. As previously mentioned, Steve’s audience is “pretty much exclusively the New Canton College community, so a bunch of college students who are young and socially aware. They *want* to learn about social issues.”. He functions as a member of the New Canton College community curating exhibits for the New Canton College community. In contrast, Natasha's audience is “extremely large and diverse”. She is responsible for working with an audience of multiple cultural backgrounds, ages, and genders. While the scope of both institutions’ collections is similar, the scale of collections at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History is significantly larger. The same is true of the staff, exhibit space, and institution’s focus.

## CHAPTER SIX: EXHIBIT ANALYSIS

### Introduction

This chapter examines three connected yet discrete phenomena within each of the four institutions studied. First, the overall concept of gender is explored. Next, the curation of Native American and racial identity is examined. Finally, community curation efforts are examined as well as how these exhibits do or do not differ from the institution's other exhibits. While it is possible to observe patterns about how each element was curated in these different institutions, there are also notable differences. Therefore, each section includes information about any perceived commonalities across sites. However, attention is also paid to distinct depictions of gender, race, and community curation in each individual institution.

### Depiction of Gender

At each of the four museums that were examined, gender was depicted in fairly consistent, conventional ways. There was little to no explicit mention of gender roles in labels, but men and women were consistently seen portraying stereotypical tasks. More specifically, men were seen hunting, fishing, and engaging in trade whereas women were seen gathering plants, tending to children, or socializing. When rituals were depicted, the majority of the participants in these rituals were male. Even for those museums that did work with Native American communities, the figures were almost all attired in ways that a modern, Western, audience would be readily able to place into a traditional male/female dichotomy. More specifically, the women wore long dresses, had longer hair, and tended to have fuller lips or softer jawlines. In contrast, the men typically wore loincloths or leather tunics with pants, had shorter hair, thinner lips, and more pronounced jawlines. When portrayed, children were almost

always depicted as infants or toddlers with no discernable gender indicators. In the few cases where older children were represented, boys outnumbered girls in each institution.

There were no depictions of two-spirited or gender nonconforming individuals. However, it is worth noting that many of these institutions did feature exhibits about Native Americans that have traditions of two-spirited, or otherwise gender nonconforming individuals (Whitehead 1983). There are multiple examples of ethnographic and historic accounts of gender nonconforming individuals, such as the berdache. While Whitehead specifically mentions historical writing about berdaches in the Iroquois and Yuman tribes (Ibid:84), she also notes that most Native American tribes in “the Plateau, Plains, Southwest, Prairie, and Southeastern regions of the continental United States and deep into Mesoamerica” (Ibid:85) had some example of gender nonconforming or gender crossing individuals. Lurie (1953) wrote about the role of the berdache in the Winnebago tribe—a tribe whose territory has historically included parts of Wisconsin. One historic example of a Native American individual who was considered to be gender nonconforming is We’wha, a Zuni berdache. Will Roscoe focused on We’wha’s life and gender status in his 1991 publication *The Zuni Man-Woman*. Although Roscoe focuses specifically on her<sup>5</sup> experiences, he also explores We’wha’s participation in a gender identity that does not directly fit within European conceptualizations of gender. According to Roscoe, We’wha was considered to be a lhamana, a mixed-gender person that was not uncommon among the Zuni (1991:22-28). These examples demonstrate that there are multiple historical indicators of gender nonconforming or gender crossing individuals within several Native American tribes, despite their lack of depiction in museum exhibits.

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<sup>5</sup> Pronoun use is difficult here, since different sources refer to We’wha as he or she. However, given her choice to perform as feminine in Western cultural contexts, such as when meeting President Grover Cleveland, ‘she/her’ seemed to be the most accurate and respectful choice.



However, given this historical precedence, this erasure within the exhibits is problematic because it gives the impression that Native Americans followed the same Western paradigm of an inflexible gender binary. Given that there are multiple ethnographic accounts of Native American groups who had individuals that did not fit into that traditional gender binary (Lurie 1953; Medicine 1983; Lang 1997), this seems somewhat inaccurate. This is especially true when juxtaposed with the assertion that the gendered depiction of the division of labor in exhibits was based on particular ethnographic texts.

### *The Abel Public Museum*

Unlike some of the larger institutions, the Abel Public Museum does not have any mannequins or figurines of Native Americans. In fact, the only mannequins in the exhibits are located in the display about the town's military history where they wear veterans uniforms from various wars. Within the rest of the museum, gender is typically not mentioned unless it is in reference to a specific individual. The only exception to this is in the cases displaying numerous taxidermy specimens. In some cases, both male and female specimens are present. However, this is not typical. Usually only one member of each species is displayed. No pattern was observed regarding whether a male or a female was selected, though this was most likely due to collection availability and the specimen's condition.

In the museum's Native American exhibits, there are few direct mentions of gender. In most labels, Native groups are referred to as "Native Americans" or "Native Peoples". The exception to this is the label associated with the cradleboard. Although small, this label discusses how mothers used to strap their infants to cradleboards in order to carry them while they traveled or performed other tasks, such as gathering. It also mentions that "[w]omen took great pride in the decorating their cradle boards (sic)." The label also includes a graphic of, presumably, this

Native American mother as she carries an infant on her back (Figure 6.1). The mother's face and figure are visible in profile. Further along in the exhibit are cases with multiple photographs of Native Americans in traditional regalia. Most of these photographs are simply captioned "a group of Oneida tribe members" or something similar. However, there are two exceptions. First, one picture is captioned "Menominee Women and Children Circa 1915." This black and white photograph depicts several seated and standing women and children in front of a wigwam (Figure 6.2). The second example of gendered language being used is found in the Plains tribes' portion of the exhibit. One of the black and white photographs in this area shows several figures in feathered headdresses and buckskin shirts and leggings. A small label next to this photograph reads "men and boys of the Lakota Sioux tribe". This, however, is the only overt mention of gender. Otherwise, the exhibit tends to ignore the topic and the gender of those depicted.

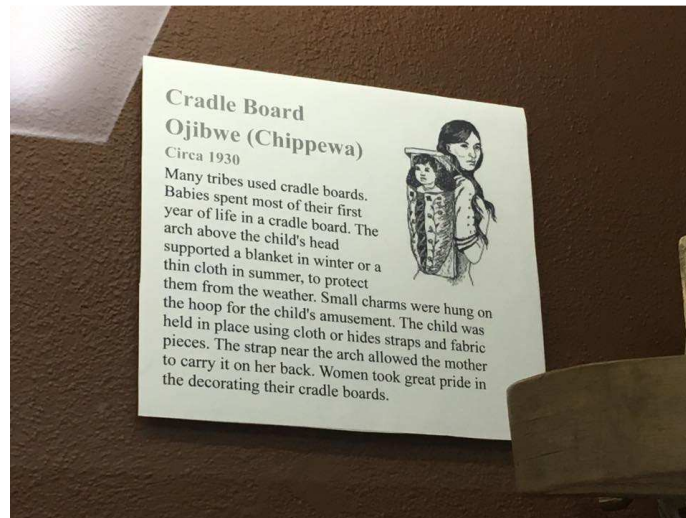


Figure 6.1. The exhibit label next to a cradle board with an illustration of a Native American woman



Figure 6.2. The photograph of Menominee Women and Children and its associated label.

### *The Pineville Public Museum*

Most of the diorama figurines at the Pineville Public Museum were meant to depict individuals of a particular gender. Men and women are found in a fairly even ratio, performing a variety of tasks. Tom indicated that the choice of which figure was engaging in which task was very deliberate. According to Tom, it was based on both “ethnographic accounts and input from the [Native groups] that helped design the exhibit”. Although some women were involved, the vast majority of these leaders were male.

In these exhibits, men were depicted foremost as hunters. This narrative trope starts as soon as human subjects are introduced in the exhibits. Shortly after the “Mammoth Butchering” diorama are the first clearly masculine figures in the exhibit. Two men holding spears of

differing length are standing in front of a painted background including several people meant to represent additional members of their tribe or family. One of the men is pointing, and the other is looking off into the distance, his spear raised slightly (Figure 6.6). While at first glance they would appear to be part of a hunting party, this is further solidified by one of the figures in the background who carries a pelt or dead animal slung over his shoulders. This theme of hunting can be seen in the Four Seasons exhibit as well. The most notable instance of this is in the section depicting Spring seasonal activities. In one of the most dynamic focal points of the exhibit hall, a man can be seen thrusting a spear into the water and spearing a fish.



*Figure 6.3.* Exhibit diorama depicting two Native American men hunting with spears.

Surprisingly, adult men are absent in both the Summer and Fall dioramas. Instead, these portions appear to focus more on the contribution of women and children. The winter scene, however, includes two male figures. As one might expect, the winter scene focuses on the interior of a dwelling. A man sits on the floor with a long wampum belt in his hands. These belts were used in gift giving and as an aid in oral storytelling. Given that the man's mouth is slightly open, and the only other person in the dwelling is sitting relatively far away, it seems more

probable that the man is telling a story or using the belt as some sort of visual aid. There is a second male figure in the Winter diorama standing outside of the dwelling. This man is dressed in slightly more European clothing, as if he is meant to serve as a visual transition between the Four Seasons portion of the exhibit and the Fur Trade exhibit. He is carrying a musket and appears to be walking or keeping watch.

Although the Fur Trade exhibit contains relatively few figures, there is a male figure standing in front of a canoe. He is carrying a tricorne hat and wearing attire associated with both Native American and European cultures. However, it is unclear if he is meant to represent a White or Metis individual. Regardless, he stands in front of a canoe and stares forward. If one studies the display's background, it is evident that a female figure follows behind him.

Overall, the male figures in the Native American exhibits at the PPM are portrayed in a relatively consistent manner. Adult men are always depicted wearing pants or leather leggings. They often wear tunics of varying length, but they rarely go past the knee. More often than not, they terminate at the mid-thigh. While men may wear jewelry or other adornment, it tends to be typically utilitarian. Belts and headscarves are the most common accessories. Additionally, Native American men are consistently portrayed as holding or interacting with an object. All of the male figures were actively doing something. They were hunting, fishing, storytelling, or in the process of moving or pointing. Their posture was upright and, while they might not be actively looking at the viewer, they were often shown gazing forward.

The female figures are portrayed in dramatic contrast to the male figures. In the first portion of the exhibit, women are present in the Mammoth Butchering diorama (Figure 6.7). However, they are absent from the hunting scene. Female figures are actually more prevalent than male figures in the Four Seasons portion of the exhibits. While adult males are absent from

both the Summer and Fall seasonal displays, adult females are present in all four seasons. The Spring portion of the exhibit features a female figure sitting under a lean-to while weaving a basket. In the Summer portion of the exhibit, there is one adult female and one male child. The female figure is sitting on the ground and appears to be processing fruits and vegetables. She is looking at the male child beside her, who is helping in the food preparation. The Fall portion of the diorama has the largest number of adult female figures of any portion of the exhibits. In this section, one woman is collecting sap from a tree. Two others are sitting on the ground and conversing, baskets of nuts and vegetables around them. According to the associated label, this particular portion is based on a specific historical correspondence that mentions that several Native American women were seen gathering Jerusalem artichokes in a location near the museum's current site. The Winter scene features only one female figure. In this scene, she sits on a bench or bed and listens to a seated male figure telling a story. This constant presence of female figures in each of the four portions of the diorama is significant because it demonstrates the vital roles that Native women played in ensuring the success of the tribe. According to Buffalohead, this depiction is accurate and it is what ultimately lead to the European narrative of Native women being "burden bearers [...] and virtual slaves to men" (1983:267). Here, Native American women are represented as being engaged in a more diverse number of tasks than men, however, the visual narrative suggest that while women were responsible for a wider range of tasks, men were responsible for tasks that were presented as being more active or dynamic. Women, in contrast, had tasks that often allowed for them to socialize with other women, such as shelling nuts or seeds.

The Fur Trade portion of the exhibits does not contain any female figures. However, the section of the exhibit that focuses on Fur Traders, their Native wives, and the formation of Metis

cultural identity includes a woman painted into the background of a diorama, following a man who is standing next to a canoe.



*Figure 6.4.* The Mammoth butchering diorama at the Pineville Public Museum

As with the male figures, the female figures are portrayed in a relatively consistent way. The female figures all wear longer dresses or skirts that cover most of their legs. They also have long hair that is typically tied back into a braid or ponytail. While the male figures have long hair, the female figures' hair is consistently longer. Additionally, they have more elaborate and diverse hairstyles, including bangs and hair ornaments. The female figures also tend to have more jewelry and embellishments like ribbon on their clothing. While several of the male figures wore headscarves or bandanas, this was not the case for the female figures. A few of the female figures held baskets or foodstuffs, but many of them were sitting and talking or listening. Their poses generally seemed more passive than those of the male figures. While all of the male

figures were either in the process of moving or gesturing, many of the female figures were sitting or looking downward.

In instances where there were male and female figures interacting, the female figure was always looking at the male figure. However, the inverse was not necessarily the case. While the male figures' gazes were usually directed towards, though not actually at, the viewer, the female figures' gazes were not. Instead, they were either looking at male figures, at each other, or downward. Those figures who were looking downward were, it should be noted, engaged in tasks such as basket weaving or sap collecting where their posture was directly correlated to their actions. While their gaze was facing downward, this particular instance did not seem to be as a way of representing deference or passivity. However, the interaction between the male and female figures in the same exhibit component is compelling. In instances where both males and females are interacting, female attention is focused on the male figure. In the case of the Summer portion of the exhibit, an adult woman watches a male child. In the case of the Winter portion, a woman sits and listens to a man speak or tell a story. Both of these instances subtly perpetuate the notion of androcentrism by creating the dominant male figure and its masculinity as drawing the attention of women. The women are passive. They sit still. They look and listen placidly. The males here are active. They have dynamic poses and are centrally placed in a way that engages more readily with the viewer. When considering the androcentric legacy of museums and their exhibits, this choice is especially illuminating. It suggests a very particular narrative of The Past-one in which Native women were largely devoid of agency and were of inferior social standing to men (Buffalohead 1983:236).

Because museums and museum exhibits have been situationally constructed in a Eurocentric and androcentric sociocultural environment, they have traditionally upheld these



biases (Haraway 1986; Hein 2010; Mills 2010). As a result, conventional exhibits have been historically constructed for the White male gaze (Cain 2008; Dancu 2011). This centralizes White men as the viewer and all other peoples as being the objectified viewed. While the male gaze is often discussed in film and other media as being a specific concept that is predicated upon male heterosexuality (Mulvey 1975), Intersectional theory asserts that the concept of race and other markers of identity interact in the formation of this phenomenon.

In addition to the male and female figures, examining the child figures in the PPM's exhibits can provide valuable insight into how curators conceptualize the gender and family of past Native American societies. Of the sites surveyed, the PPM displays one of the largest number of child figures. In most other instances, the only children depicted were infants or toddlers. The PPM, however, contains several figures of children performing various tasks. The first instance of this is the child that can be seen in the Mammoth Butchering diorama. It is difficult to ascertain the child's intended gender, however, given that it is wearing clothing associated with male figures in later portions of the diorama, it seems likely that it was meant to represent a male child. This child is carrying a large mammoth organ, most likely a kidney. The second instance of an older child is located in the Summer portion of the Four Seasons exhibit. Unlike the child represented in the Mammoth Butchering diorama, this figure's intended gender is more clearly defined. The figure wears a shirt and a loincloth. Its hair is also relatively short, especially in comparison to the female adult figure that sits near it. Tom indicated that this figure was meant to represent a boy, and that it was based on a specific painting of Native Americans produced by a European settler.

In his interviews, Tom indicated that the museum's exhibits had been viewed "extremely positively" by Native American groups. He also indicated that there hadn't been any feedback

from feminist organizations or individuals. Comments have been generally positive about all of the exhibits. However, I came across a 2012 post about a college student's observations of gender in the PPM's exhibits on a blog titled *In Spite of You and Jane!*. Although it is no longer updated, Sage Calhoun is the author of the blog. Calhoun indicates that she originally started the blog as part of a project for a Women's and Gender Studies minor at a college near Pineville. In 2012, she and her boyfriend went to the Pineville Public Museum to "look at how gender (specifically women's gender roles) are portrayed in the exhibits, if at all" (2012:N.p.).

In addition to Calhoun's analysis of the exhibits, she includes several resources about Native Americans and gender. She also includes a link to a documentary series about two-spirited people, however, she does not reference them in the body of her post. Calhoun starts her post by discussing an interaction that she had with the museum's elderly greeter who assumed that Calhoun was more interested in seeing a temporary exhibit about painted porcelain whereas her boyfriend was more interested in the exhibit about baseball. She then asserts, "Once out of earshot, I immediately began a mini-rant about how sexist her comments were, however well-intended" (Ibid:N.p.). This interaction is significant because it frames Calhoun as being conscious of, and sensitive to, gender-based stereotypes.

The post takes the reader through the exhibits, describing "The Wisconsin Story" briefly before exploring the exhibits depicting Native Americans. First, she describes the Mammoth Hunt diorama. Calhoun describes the signage as being "extremely good about avoiding gender-specific words and practically eliminated any mention of gender roles" (Ibid). She then discusses the figures. While Calhoun praises the signage for maintaining gender neutrality, she does note that "the four figures in the diorama are all female" (Ibid). However, Calhoun's assertion may not be correct. One figure is clearly observable as a female: it has a pronounced feminine frame and

facial features. As it is standing in an upright posture, facing the viewer, it is fairly clear that this figurine is meant to be an adult woman. A second figure, reaching inside the chest cavity of the mammoth, is more difficult to see. However, there does appear to be a feminine silhouette to its hips, and it is also wearing a long leather garment reminiscent of a dress. A third adult figure stands atop the carcass, presumably using a stone knife to deflesh the mammoth. Due to its bent posture and arm placement, it is difficult to attempt to assign it a gender based on secondary sexual characteristics. But, it is wearing a short leather tunic and leggings. This differs from the attire of the two other figures that appear female. Its height indicates that it is most likely an adult, though its placement makes it difficult to determine gender based on height. However, the differences in its apparel seem to indicate that it is likely male. The final figure in this diorama is that of a child. It is smaller than the other figures, and has clearly more juvenile facial features. It wears a leather tunic and leggings, but it is standing upright and in full view of the audience. Its lack of secondary sexual characteristics seem to further indicate that it depicts a child, but, the gender of that child is not immediately evident. Like the third figure, it wears a shorter leather tunic and leggings. Given the costume choices here, and in later parts of the exhibit, it seems likely that this figure is actually meant to represent a young boy.

There are several likely reasons for Calhoun's interpretation. First, each figurine has long hair that is tied back into a long ponytail. In a Eurocentric culture, this hairstyle is traditionally associated with femininity; while men might have ponytails in modern contexts, they are not typically this long. Second, each of the figures has relatively long eyelashes. In modern culture, this, again, is often seen as a marker of femininity. In this instance though, it is likely that this was due to product availability or artist style rather than a deliberate choice to portray all of the figures as being female.

Nevertheless, this difference of opinion as to the gender of a particular figure is illuminating. Both Calhoun and I drew very different conclusions from the same diorama. She concluded that:

[The exhibit] places women within the domestic sphere as asserted by [classic depictions of man as hunter and woman as gatherer], even though the description makes absolutely no mention of women being the ones to typically prepare meals. Is this just unintended sexism on the part of the diorama creators, then? Or were they choosing to use four women based on scientific evidence of women dominating the domestic sphere? If it's the later [sic], then why did the museum choose not to publicize such evidence to go along with the diorama? (ibid).

In contrast, I viewed the scene as representing a family. Here, four family or community members (most likely a man, woman, and two children) are working together to butcher a mammoth and transport its meat back to their home.

Calhoun's analysis does situate the mammoth butchering diorama within the context of its neighboring diorama. This display is smaller and less visually impactful than the mammoth butchering scene. Instead, it depicts two obviously male figures standing in front of a wintry, coniferous landscape. They are both wearing leather tunics and leggings and carrying spears of different lengths. Painted in the background behind them are several other figures with game and bundles slung over their shoulders. Calhoun asserts that "[t]he other diorama featuring our prehistoric ancestors shows men doing what one might expect after seeing 'Butchering the Mammoth' – hunting" (Ibid). However, I felt that there was insufficient reason to conclude that the displays were meant to be two halves of one narrative.

Our profound differences in opinion have interesting and complex implications for this exhibit, and for museum exhibits in general. Of course, the most pressing issues for many might be which of us is right and which perspective most closely aligns with the curators and exhibit designer's vision. However, to focus on judging the accuracy in an interpretation that is largely

predicated upon individual experiences is deeply myopic. These differences in opinion do not mean that the exhibit was ineffective. Rather, it demonstrates how much a person's background and experiences are likely to impact their interpretation of particular form of visual media. Calhoun's background is predominantly in Women's and Gender Studies whereas mine is in Anthropology and Museum Studies. As such, we utilized our respective disciplines to make sense of these dioramas and came to dramatically different conclusions. This same phenomenon occurs whenever visitors view museum exhibits. They each bring their own interpretation to the exhibit that is predicated upon preconceived notions about gender, family structure, and the division of labor.

Calhoun then goes on to discuss the portrayal of gender and gender roles in the “Four Seasons” exhibit, concluding that there was overall very little mention of gender within this exhibit. In fact, Calhoun seems surprised to learn that many of the figures in this area were female. Yet, she also states that “each and every one of the women within the Native American section of the exhibit are portrayed as inhabiting the domestic sphere” (Ibid). This statement appears to be largely true. While Calhoun does not discuss how the men are depicted as inhabiting the public sphere, this can also be seen throughout this portion of the exhibits at the PPM.

One of Calhoun’s biggest concerns is the placement of women firmly in the domestic sphere. She discusses the division of labor, noting:

[the exhibit label] talks about how ‘Indian women were seen gathering Jerusalem artichokes’ [at a nearby location] in 1835. This sentence does not necessarily make the claim that women were commonly the gatherers of the community since it is stating a single occurrence [...]but because they chose multiple women to be the ones appearing in this diorama, it makes me wonder if that’s what is implied (Ibid).

Here, Calhoun is referencing the paradigmatic shift that has moved away from the theory of ‘man the hunter, woman the gatherer’ (Slocum 1975:36-50; Gonzalez-Marcen, Monton-Subias and Picazo 2008: 3-8; Monton-Subias 2010) towards a more contingent view of the gendered division of labor.

Calhoun then goes on to discuss the Fur Trade portion of the exhibits at the PPM. She mentions that this is the first instance she noticed of the labels specifically focusing on the role of gender in Native American society. This particular portion of the exhibit examines the intermarriage of European men and Native women, as well as the formation of Metis identity. When discussing the role of women, though, Calhoun seems to initially feel that “the text describes the wife as a more of a useful tool rather than a person” (2012: N.p.). However, she then capitulates that, “[O]ne could argue that the text is also somewhat glorified [sic] the Native American wife, as she is the one to teach her husband new survival skills and Native American innovations” (Ibid). Calhoun then examines the placement of the figures within the diorama. She notes that, “it definitely places the husband first – the wife is merely painted into the background” (Ibid).

Her analysis of this portion of the exhibits then focuses on some additional labels found within the Fur Trade exhibit. One label about the treaty of Chicago notes that “[t]hree prominent Potawatomi men [...] were signers of the Chicago Treaty”. Calhoun asserts that this “shows that it is men who held power in the Potawatomi tribe during this time period, though this could be a result of westernization” (2012: N.p.). There is further mention of the exhibit’s labels, including a discussion of the events that lead to large numbers of Native Americans moving westward after the government had taken their lands. Calhoun takes issue with the portion of the text that

focuses on the Vieau brothers and their wives. While it mentions the first names of both men, it fails to mention either of the wives' names. For Calhoun:

[T]his does not overtly discuss gender roles, but does ignore the humanity of the men's wives. Why is it we get no mention of their names, but we are told that "the Vieau name still appears in Potawatomi genealogies"? Wouldn't the removal of Native American tribes also have had an effect on them, seeing as they were of Potawatomi blood (Ibid)?

Calhoun's concerns about the lack of named female figures here are valid, however, it is important to consider some of the potential reasons for this exclusion. While it is theoretically possible that this exclusion was a deliberate choice by those who designed the exhibit, it seems significantly more likely that this due to a lack of information. Given that Native American women embody multiple interacting spheres of oppression, they are an example of a group that has experienced significant historical erasure. As such, their names were often not noted, while the names of their Native male counterparts and, arguably, their White female counterparts were more readily recorded. Therefore, it is significantly more likely that the names of the Vieau brothers' wives have, unfortunately, been lost to history. This lack of named female characters is a common feature among several of the museums examined, but was generally assumed in this project to stem from a lack of information rather than from either indifference or malice.

Calhoun does discuss the depiction of women in other portions of the museum, focusing on exhibits about neoclassical art and local artists. At the end of her analysis, Calhoun concludes that the museum was "overall fairly good at keeping its educational texts gender neutral, [but] the dioramas spoke another story" (Ibid). She then goes on to say that men were portrayed as being "the important hunters and fishermen" while women were depicted as staying "within their domestic bubble" (Ibid). The fact that she draws a dichotomy between 'important' and 'domestic' is interesting, however. While the gendered analogy of men to public and women to domestic is well-established, the fact that Calhoun sees hunting as being more important than

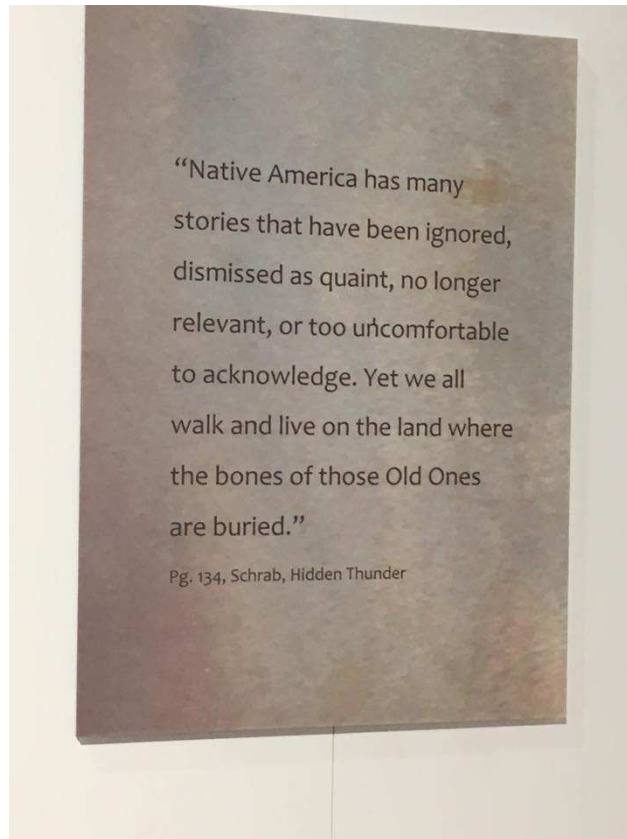
gathering is illuminating. Historically, it is clear that men's involvement in the public sphere has generally been more closely associated with social and economic prestige (Bird, et al. 2009:105-108). Not only is it unclear whether or not the division of labor was based on a gendered divide before Westernization (Buffalohead 1983), but it is also unclear if this privileging of male tasks and, and male experiences, was historically true for Native Americans. As Calhoun's perspective is also culturally situated, her critique of these exhibits establishes a kind of causality dilemma. When considering an 'authentic' portrayal of Native American women and the gendered division of labor, it is indeed possible that museum curators and exhibit designers are portraying women in less prestigious tasks because of their own internalized misogyny and Eurocentrism or it could also be our that our associating those tasks with less prestige is a product of internalized misogyny. However, Calhoun's perception here is relevant. It is unclear if domestic tasks have been historically perceived as being unimportant because they are traditionally considered 'women's work', or if women were traditionally compelled to perform domestic tasks because their contribution and potential as women were undervalued. Again, this is based on a Western perspective of the gendered division of labor as well as the pervasive androcentrism that has characterized the development of its cultures. Several scholars have postulated that the misogyny involved in a gendered division of labor historically present in European societies was not a cultural universal (Klein and Ackerman 1995:13-16; Smith 2005:116-117). Obviously, making overarching claims about multiple cultures proves complicated. However, historical evidence does indicate that the idea of 'separate but equal' spheres often, and perhaps typically, results in the privileging of one group's experiences over another's.

While the first floor of the Pineville Public Museum is dedicated to permanent exhibit space, the second floor is mostly composed of temporary exhibits. There are some permanent



exhibits featuring miniatures of artists' studios from varying time periods that are based on specific historical sources. While there are some female figures present in these instances, they are outnumbered by men. Additionally, the women are always either observing the artist at work, or modeling for him. There are no female artists depicted, which is fairly consistent with art exhibits in other institutions (Duncan 1995:103-132). The rest of the second floor is devoted to temporary exhibits that rotate every few months.

While there have been historical and archaeological exhibits in these spaces, art exhibits are the most common. At the time of my writing of this thesis, there were two art exhibits that focused on local artists. The first of these was an exhibit of metal sculptures produced by a father and son team of artists. The second featured the work of Geri Schrab, a Menominee artist. Schrab's watercolor paintings depict various rock art in the state of Wisconsin. The exhibit itself juxtaposes these images with quotes from Native American activists, scholars, and tribal leaders about the importance of these rock art sites (Figure 6.8).



*Figure 6.5.* An example of a label with a quote from the Pineville Public Museum's exhibit about Geri Schrab

The PPM also has multiple educational programs that directly relate to both the permanent and temporary exhibits. They also provide several events that focus on traditionally marginalized groups. One of these is a Girls and Women in STEM series that lets girls interested in these fields talk to a female STEM professional about her career. Although it is primarily designed for preteens and young teenagers, it also provides a valuable networking opportunity for older girls and gives younger girls more exposure to these fields. The PPM also provides multiple events for Black History Month in February. Since the community of Pineville has a significant Black population, the museum staff feels that it is important to have cultural events like the February 2017's National African American Read-In, an event where adults and children read works of literature by African American authors.

### *The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

As with the other sites surveyed, Native American concepts of gender at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History are portrayed in a very stereotypical sense. Many of the older dioramas depicted in particular stereotypical gender roles. Men are typically seen hunting or fishing. In contrast, women are usually cooking or watching children. Both men and women were depicted making crafts, however. The division of labor in this context was usually gendered, but this depiction was largely contingent upon existing ethnographic data. As an example, women were typically depicted making baskets or ceramics. However, the weaving of blankets and other textiles is depicted as being either a male or a female task, depending on which tribe was the subject of the exhibit. In the case of the Hopi, a male weaver is depicted (Figure 6.9). This is consistent with ethnographic sources that assert that weaving was commonly considered a male task for the Hopi (Kent 1945). In the miniature dioramas, it is initially difficult to determine specific figures' intended gender. However, it seems the most likely that the miniature diorama depicting Tlingit weaving has a female weaver and a male designer. This is also ethnographically consistent. However, the nearby label about weaving in the Northwest Coast provides a somewhat conflicting account. According to the text, "[w]eaving was women's work among these Indians" (Tlingit Weaving Exhibit). However, it ignores the fact that in the case of Tlingit blanket making, most of the blankets' designs were created by the men. While this negation may seem subtle, it does perpetuate the notion that men and women engaged in highly compartmentalized gender roles in Tlingit society, a phenomenon which several archaeologists and historians have challenged (Klein and Ackerman 1995:13-16; Costin 2013).



*Figure 6.6.* A diorama depicting male weaver at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History

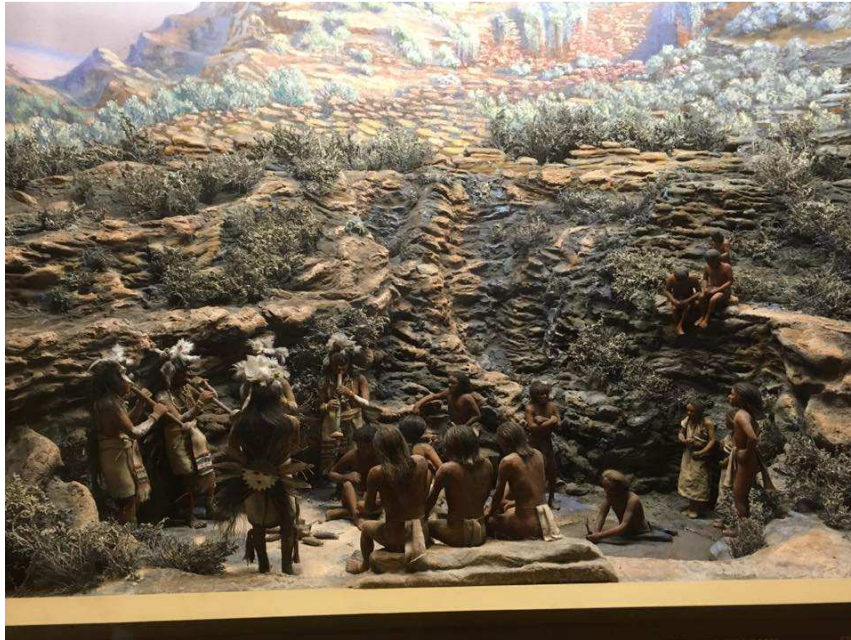
One of the other aspects of gender that is noticeable in the full-sized and miniature dioramas is the sexual division of labor expressed in ritual and ceremonial practices. In most of the depictions of pre-contact rituals, the associated figurines are almost exclusively male. The only exception to this is in one of the rituals in the American Southwest. In this portion of the exhibit, four female figures are kneeling before multiple male figures wearing Kachina masks. There are also a number of female onlookers from nearby buildings (Figure 6.10). Here, the women can be distinguished by their hairstyle and clothing, which are mirrored in the nearby full-sized dioramas.



*Figure 6.7. A miniature diorama at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History that depicts a Kachina ritual.*

In almost every other ritual context, however, women are largely absent. From a purely visual perspective, this creates the impression that rituals were largely associated with men and masculinity. The nearby case of the Drab Flute Ceremony of the Hopi is one example. Ethnographic accounts of Hopi society discuss two distinctive “Flute orders, the Blue and the Drab” (Voth 1912:123). These two societies are responsible for celebrating several specific ceremonies during the year (Ibid), including the one depicted in this miniature diorama. The associated label mentions “[f]lute boys and girls” (Drab Flute Ceremony Exhibit Label), however, there are only two clearly female figures present. Both of them are carrying bundles, and it seems likely that they are meant to represent flute girls. However, both are overshadowed by the taller figure of a male that is placed closer to the foreground. Most likely he is meant to represent a flute boy. The central figures of the flute players and spectators sitting on stone

benches all appear to be adult males. This results in a visual diminishing of the role of these female characters, and the role of female characters in this particular ritual (Figure 6.11).



*Figure 6.8.* A miniature diorama depicting the Drab Flute Ceremony

Additionally, particular attention is paid to rituals that surround masculine identity formation and masculine experiences. The exhibits focusing on the Plains tribes, for example, discuss two such rituals: the Vision Quest and the Sun Dance. According to the associated label, the Vision Quest is a male coming of age ritual “in which a young man fasts alone for four days and nights in order to receive a Vision and a Guardian Spirit that will guide him throughout his life”. This echoes the ethnographic literature which asserts, “[m]ore than the result of ritualized fasting and sleep deprivation, the vision quest expresses perceiving the land in mythological terms” (Martínez 2004:80). While Vision Quests are frequently rituals reserved for males coming of age (Ibid:87-88), there is no mention within the exhibit of whether or not an equivalent female ritual exists in Plains tribes (Whitehead 1983:92). Ethnographic accounts, for

example, discuss the *Tapa Wakan Yap* and the *Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan* rituals, which were specifically reserved for girls and women (Bysiewicz and Van de Mark 1975:264). While specific rituals may have been reserved for male participants, the label also ignores the socially significant role of female coming of age rituals (Brown 1953:116-138).

The Sun Dance is described by the WMNH's exhibit label as a ritual undertaken by a man "so that he might reverse misfortune, avenge a death, insure hunting success, or return a sick relative to health". However, the term "Sun Dance" is actually used in ethnographic literature to describe several similar, but not identical, rituals performed by multiple Plains tribes (Brown 1953:68-69; Dorsey 1905). For example, Dorsey notes that "[t]he Sun Dance of the Cheyenne, like that of the Arapaho, but unlike that of the Siouan tribes, is the direct result of a vow or pledge made by a single individual" (1905:57, emphasis added). Therefore, it is inaccurate to frame Sun Dances as being limited to masculine concerns, or as involving only male participants. In the case of the Sioux, Sun Dances are above all, community rituals. These communities include men, women, and children with significant roles, even for those who do not dance (Brown 1953:70-74).

Further, Dorsey's ethnographic accounts of a Cheyenne Sun Dance directly mention the required participation of at least one female dancer. Specifically, he states that "It is the custom that should it not, for any reason, be proper for the wife of the Pledger to take part in the Sun Dance, he should at this time [...] appoint a woman to take her place" (1905:59). The wording of this label is problematic for two reasons. First, it ignores the perspectives of women and children in these ritual contexts and thus perpetuates a cross culturally androcentric narrative by asserting that 'maleness' is what ultimately makes an individual exceptional or worthy of participating in the Sun Dance. Second, it ignores the fact that the Sun Dance is a generic name given to a set of highly diverse rituals that differed greatly between individual Plains tribes.

It is not until the more recent Native American exhibits that one can see a phenomenon akin to gender parity within ritual contexts. The Powwow diorama does depict a mostly equal number of male and female dancers, and it provides detailed descriptions of each dancer's regalia. The labels associated with the costumes do specify which dances are learned by men, women, or children, however, this is presented in a relatively egalitarian manner. It also depicts female figures dancing in styles that were more commonly associated with men, showing that gender roles might have some degree of fluidity. However, the implications of this are somewhat problematic as it suggests that Native American cultures have become more egalitarian in modern times. Given the juxtaposition of gender parity and European contact, this seems to perpetuate the myth that the Europeans were the ones who brought ideas of gender-based equality. In reality, this was not the case as Native women have had to fight for their rights under European colonialism and a culture of misogyny; a fight that continues to this day (Medicine 2001; Goeman 2009 and 2013; Simpson 2014).

In addition to depictions of labor and ritual activities, leisure activities are portrayed in both full sized and miniature dioramas. The depiction of leisure time at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History is also presented in a highly gendered fashion. However, specific leisure activities are portrayed as also somewhat dependent on age, at least when differentiating between the activities of men and boys. As such, the leisure activities can be best categorized as falling into one of the following categories: leisure activities of men, leisure activities of boys, and leisure activities of girls and women.

Men are the most common group depicted engaging in leisure activities. In addition to physical representations of games such as chunky and lacrosse, there are multiple labels that discuss the rules. There are also historic photographs of men playing games in the Native Games



portion of the exhibits. In the section discussing Iroquois gender roles, the labels mention that “[men had] leisure time for games of lacrosse and contents at archery or snow snake.” Almost all depictions or discussions of games feature male figures and are implicitly framed as being masculine activities.

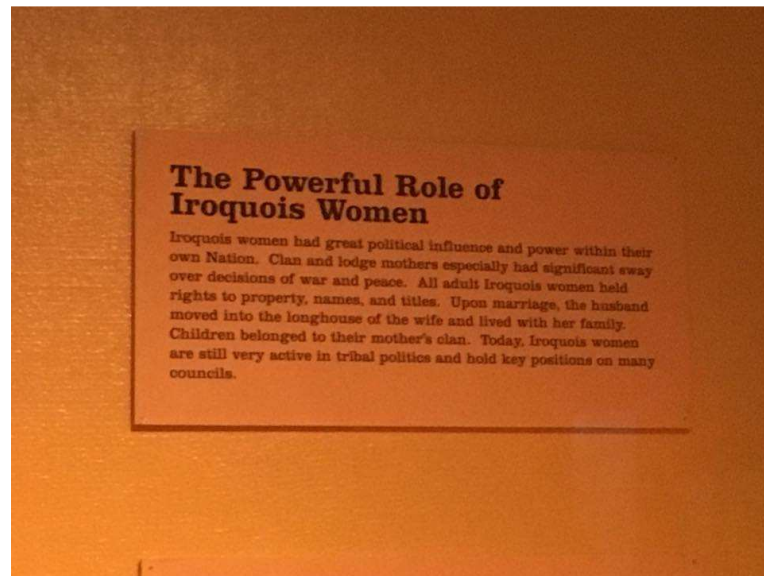
Boys are depicted as engaging in similar leisure activities to men with a few differences. First, most depictions of boys are found in either full size or miniature dioramas. There are no historical photographs of boys playing games, and there is little mention of their other leisure activities found within exhibit labels. One of the miniature dioramas features two small boys playing with tops (Figure 6.12), and others depict boys running or watching the leisure activities of older men. However, they typically do not participate directly in these activities. Overall, boys’ leisure activities are depicted as falling into one of two categories: simplified men’s activities or physical activities. Some examples of the former category include boys engaging in games like lacrosse, boys playing with tops, and boys watching men play chunky. Examples of boys engaging in physical activities are a bit rarer, but there are multiple examples of boys running around and engaging in an activity that looks relatively similar to tag.



*Figure 6.9.* A miniature diorama depicting a village scene. Two boys can be seen in the foreground playing with tops.

In contrast, the leisure activities of girls and women are largely ignored or not mentioned. While men and boys are shown playing games, the depiction of girls and women in conjunction with games or game pieces is largely incidental. The exception to this is in the Native Games exhibit, where Shiny is depicted as being a feminine activity similar to lacrosse. Other than this example, however, girls and women are depicted as constantly engaging in some sort of practical work. Even if a group of girls and women is sitting and talking, their hands are otherwise engaged. The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History shows girls and women making pottery, making food, and processing hides, all while talking to other girls and women. On occasion, a group of girls or women will be watching boys or men play a game, but they are still typically doing something else simultaneously. Additionally, while boys and men are depicted as having specific leisure activities, the same is not true for girls and women. Girls are not depicted as playing with toys, but rather as helping other women in the tribe with a variety of household

tasks. Additionally, the leisure activities of girls and women are never explicitly discussed in labels. Despite specific examples given in the Iroquois label about men, for example, the corresponding label for Iroquois women omits this information (Figure 6.13).



*Figure 6.10.* The Powerful Role of Iroquois Women exhibit label at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History.

The sum of these curatorial choices is that it suggests to the viewer that men and boys had leisure time whereas girls and women did not. Additionally, it appears that leisure time, like labor and ritual, was highly restricted on the basis of gender. Men and boys are depicted as engaging in competitive games that honed survival skills. Conversely, girls and women are relegated to passively talking with other girls and women while working on something with direct practical benefit to the community. This portrayal also furthers the dichotomy that men are individualistic whereas women are social. Another interesting difference is that boys are depicted playing with toys while girls are not. In fact, there are no other depictions of girls engaging in play. This includes stereotypically feminine forms of play such as playing 'house' or with dolls. There is one label that discusses how both boys and girls cared for Kachina Dolls, however, no

dioramas of this behavior exists. Given that there are multiple examples of boys playing, this seems to suggest that girls did not engage in play or, more likely, that their play behavior has been overlooked in favor of their male counterparts.

The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History has multiple labels and exhibit components that compare and contrast males and females in specific Native American tribes. Perhaps the most discernable can be found in the exhibit depicting the Iroquois. There, a label entitled “The Powerful Role of Iroquois Women” emphasizes the gender roles of Iroquois women. It states that they had “great political influence and power” and “significant sway over decisions of war and peace.” It mentions some of the rights that they traditionally had, including “rights to property, names, and titles” and concludes with the assertion that Iroquois women are still politically active and hold a number of significant positions on a variety of tribal councils. In contrast, a nearby label (entitled “The Man’s Role”) discusses the role of men in Iroquois society. It mentions that a man was considered to be the “provider of fish and game, warrior, housebuilder, and craftsman” and also “played a major part in the political and religious life of the community”. The label also discusses that he “taught his sons the skills needed for adulthood” and notes some common leisure activities, such as lacrosse or archery.

#### *The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

Depictions of gender at The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology are not particularly common. There are several reasons for this; however, the most obvious one is that the institution’s visible storage discourages the addition of lengthy labels or diagrams. As such, there is no gendered language associated with particular objects. Most labels refer to the group and country of origin and little else. However, there are multiple objects that display figures that most museum visitors would assign a particular gender based on culturally determined

indicators, such as clothing or secondary sexual characteristics. Obviously, these assumptions are problematic, as these markers of identity differ across cultures and time periods. The exhibits themselves, generally do not contain specific reference to an individual's gender. There are, however, a few exceptions to this lack of gendered language. One example is the exhibits about anthropology and the history of the NCCMA on the first floor; is the second is in the temporary exhibit space on the first floor; and a third is depicted on the second floor gallery in the temporary exhibit space.

The first instance of gendered language is found in the main galleries on the first floor. This exhibit to the left of the large visible storage area focuses on explaining anthropology to the layperson, with a short discussion of each of the four subfields. It also goes on to mention the anthropology department's history at New Canton College, including archaeological field expeditions. Gendered pronouns are used in this context, when referring to specific individuals, such as New Canton College professors that led field expeditions. For example, the text states that "he [a New Canton College faculty member] led a group of students to Ethiopia". Additionally, gendered language is also utilized in multiple labels concerning the subfields of anthropology. There is a plaster cast of the head and shoulders of a man from Guatemala (Figure 6.3). This is one of several casts that were taken of indigenous people on one of the college's expeditions to the areas. The casts were originally used in anthropometric studies of indigenous populations and are used to represent the field of cultural anthropology. Further, the field of biological anthropology is represented by an articulated skeleton from the museum's extensive osteological collection. Previously, a label next to this skeleton indicated that it is a "female skeleton". However, this has since been removed. The exhibit to the immediate right of the visible storage area also contains gendered language when referring to specific individuals, such

as donors and curators, who made significant contribution to the NCCMA. Notably, the exhibit features multiple prominent female donors and discusses their contributions to the collection (Figure 6.4).

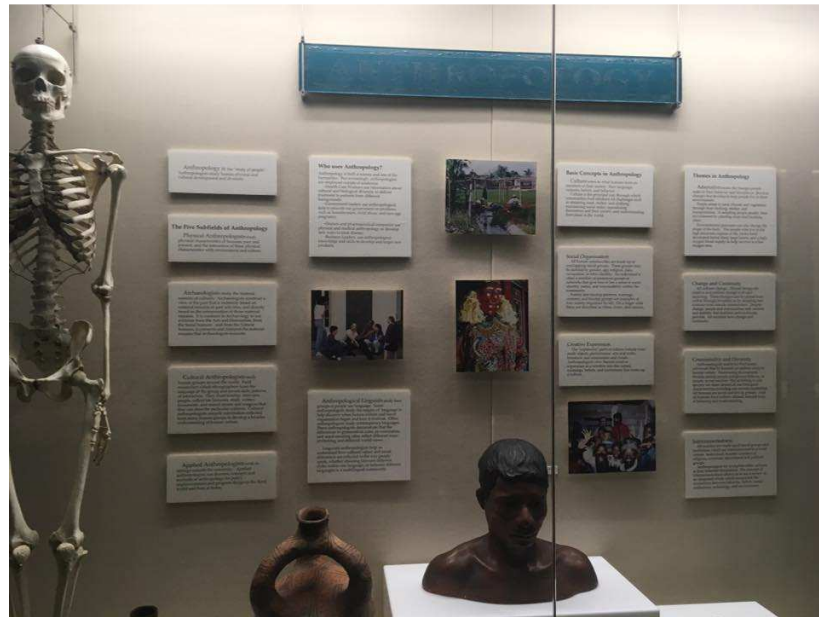


Figure 6.11. The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology's exhibit explaining the field of Anthropology with plaster cast of man's head in lower center.



Figure 6.12. Photograph of an exhibit case that talks about the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology's prominent donors and its role as a teaching museum.

The exhibit about cultural appropriation also features gendered language. However, this, again, is used directly when referring to particular individuals. For example, the label associated with the 1930s photoshoot contains the phrase “consider how [the native jewelry] looks next to these two women’s modern clothing and hairstyles”. However, even though cultural appropriation in fashion is discussed, it is not framed as being an issue specific to White women. There are other examples of New Canton College professors, who were predominantly male. The exhibit also is critical of these men for their participation in cultural appropriation and encouraging their non-Native students to participate in problematic activities such as Native American fashion shows and dances.

Although the second floor murals contain multiple female figures (Figure 6.5), there is no specific mention of the women in the “Science, Art, Stereotype” exhibit. While this exhibit provides a critical and compelling examination of the ethnocentrism and racism present in anthropology and museums, its lack of discussion about gender does limit its ability to engage in truly Intersectional work. The murals that the exhibit critiques are part of a larger cultural narrative of racism, but they are also part of a larger cultural narrative of sexism. The ways in which the female figures are relegated to stereotypical, less visually important roles is significant, because they indicate patriarchal thinking about the role of women in Native American societies.

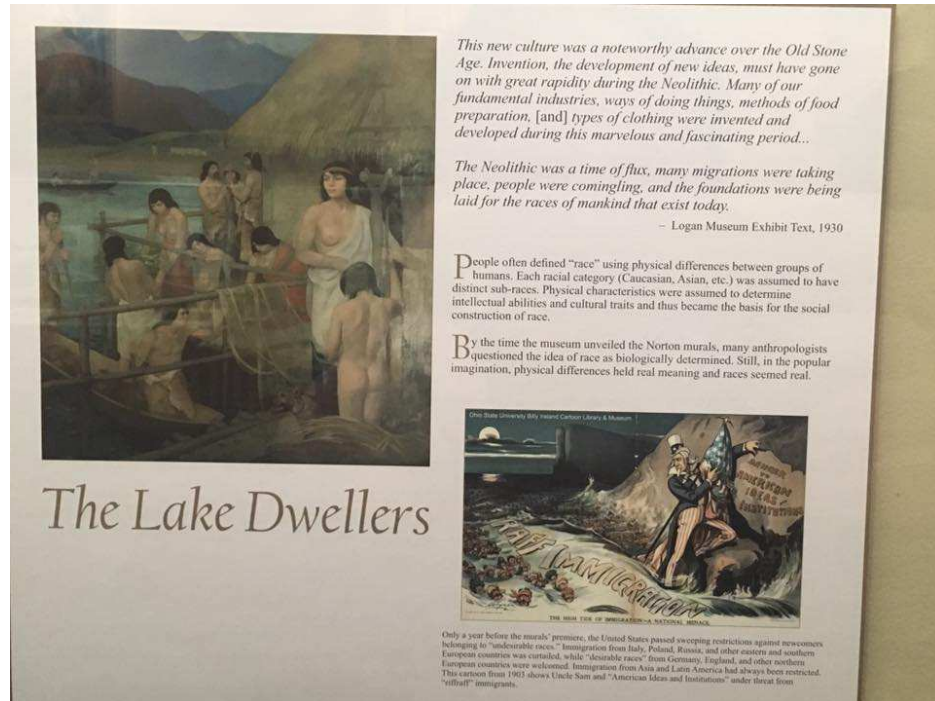


Figure 6.13. An example of the female characters depicted by the murals in the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology. While this label depicts the Swiss Lake Dweller people, the style and composition of each mural is similar.

## Depictions of Race

While depictions of gender were often very evident in each museum, depictions of race and ethnicity tended to be less concrete. Discussions of ethnic identity were generally not included, with the notable exception of the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History's exhibits focusing on Native American groups in the modern era. In the museums examined, Native Americans were actually depicted more frequently as figures in dioramas compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, it was rare for specific Native Americans to be referenced by name. This was especially true in the case of photographs, where a Native American person was typically described as a member of their tribe and then a gendered descriptor, such as 'Ojibwe man', 'Cree woman', or 'Inuit boy'. According to the museum professionals interviewed, this is due to both individual curatorial choices of what material to include, and the desire to incorporate primary photographs into exhibits when possible.



### *The Abel Public Museum*

Due to the Abel Public Museum's small size, there is not much detailed discussion about topics such as race and ethnic identity. However, the museum does include exhibits that focus on the contribution of both Native American and European American settlers to the area. The museum has a fairly diverse collection of Native American artifacts that were donated to the museum by a number of amateur archaeologists from the area, but chooses to focus on the tribes of Wisconsin and the Plains tribes. The sections on Wisconsin tribes discuss how they were forcibly relocated by White settlers and a series of government treaties. It also includes a few examples of their handicrafts and subsistence patterns. This includes specific examples of Native American contributions to food and agriculture. For a largely agrarian community like Abel, this is especially meaningful. The exhibits do include some mention of myths and folktales, such as how the porcupine got its quills (Figure 6.14), but, according to the curatorial staff, none of these are considered to be sacred knowledge by Native American groups.



Figure 6.14. This exhibit case at the Abel Public Museum includes a lengthy folktale about how the porcupine got its quills.

By comparison, the White settlers' contributions are depicted a bit more specifically. There is particular mention of several historical figures who were significant in the town's founding. This includes both municipal figures, such as the mayor, and business figures, such as the owner of a historic coffee shop. Additionally, each uniform depicted in the veterans' exhibit belonged to a White soldier. This in and of itself is not especially significant, given that the population of Abel has historically been overwhelmingly White. However, it does give the impression that Native Americans had a stronger sense of communal identity whereas White Americans were more individualistic. The White members of Abel were portrayed as specific people, with corresponding photographs and anecdotes. The Native Americans, in contrast, are portrayed as a community, with little to no additional documentation other than some artifacts. This contrast does seem somewhat problematic in that it relies on old stereotypes of Native

Americans not having individual agency and being a mysterious culture frozen in time (A. Cobb 2005: 487).

### *The Pineville Public Museum*

One of the most notable things about the Pineville Public Museum's exhibits is its dedication to the chronological events of the area. However, the epochs that occurred before the arrival of humans are somewhat abbreviated in favor of presenting more information about the prehistoric Native Americans in the area around Pineville. From there, exhibitions depict a number of technological developments and cultural changes that have significant historical impact on the archaeological record. The Four Seasons exhibit is the most visually impressive portion of the permanent exhibits at the PPM. It is relatively centrally located in the museum space. Additionally, the layout encourages the visitor to view Native American subsistence patterns and their relationship with the changing seasons as cyclical. When juxtaposed with the linear progression of previous and subsequent exhibit layouts, this creates the sense that Native American culture changed little between the rise of major cultural complexes and European contact. However, as previous research indicates, Native American cultures were actually highly complex and engaged in dynamic cultural and economic practices (Wolf 2010). Once the exhibits start focusing on European contact, the mention of several named characters becomes relevant.

The only instance where the PPMs dioramas depict White figures is in conjunction with the Fur Trade. Additionally, several White traders are named. Some of these individuals also have associated photographs and other primary documentation. However, the PPMs exhibits are notable in that they also do make specific mention of multiple Native American individuals, specifically those who signed treaties with Europeans. These treaties, and the Fur Trade in

general, are portrayed by the Pineville Public Museum as being relatively peaceful affairs that mutually benefited both the Native Americans and the Europeans. The PPM's exhibits approach further European contact in a somewhat unusual way. While they do discuss how harmful contact ultimately proved to be for the Native Americans, this is mainly framed in relation to the Fur Trade. Specifically, the label notes that "the tragedy of the Indians' giving up their lands and moving away in large numbers had a major impact on the lives of the traders." This is problematic for several reasons. First, it frames the Native Americans' worth as being predicated upon their usefulness to predominantly White traders. Second, the phrase 'the tragedy of the Indians' giving up their lands and moving away in large numbers' is especially telling. Here, the phrase 'the tragedy' and the use of passive voice provide a way of ignoring White colonizers' culpability. The phrase 'giving up their lands' is also another example of historical whitewashing. This grammatical construction implies that Native Americans willingly left their traditional territories, as does 'moving away in large numbers' (Lonetree 2012:34-35). In reality, Native Americans were forced off their land by White settlers and a White government and they did not give away their land; it was taken from them. Their 'moving away in large numbers' was the direct result of being exiled and fleeing from genocide or being forcibly relocated (Mason 1988; Loew 2001).

One of the current temporary exhibits at the PPM is the artwork of Geri Schrab. A member of the Menominee tribe, she draws inspiration from Native American petroglyphs. In addition to Schrab's artwork, the exhibit includes multiple passages from *Hidden Thunder: Rock Art of the Upper Midwest*. As one label notes, this book includes "[v]iewpoints by members of the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and other Native nations [about the] historic and cultural significance of these sites. Together these myriad voices reveal layers of meaning and cultural

context”. These passages are juxtaposed with Schrab’s watercolor depictions of Native American rock art, and include multiple perspectives about the aesthetic, cultural, and ecological significance of these sites. Many of the quotes are from Native American elders, including a large number of women. Several of Schrab’s paintings feature depictions of Mother Earth, childbirth, and other depictions of femininity within Native American cultures. The fact that the exhibit utilizes quotes from indigenous peoples to talk about conservation issues that are important to them is significant. Additionally, displaying artwork from a person who embodies multiple interacting spheres of oppression indicates a willingness to engage in a more multivocal approach to exhibit content.

#### *The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

As previously discussed, the Native American exhibits at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History are divided into two very distinctive sections. “Accolades of Endurance”, the exhibit that was curated with a multivocal approach to community curation, is the portion that the visitor typically walks through first. One of the main goals of this particular exhibit is that it explores how Native Americans have made significant positive contributions to a variety of fields, including plant and animal domestication. It also provides specific primary sources, such as journals and firsthand accounts of Native American experiences with colonialism. The fact that it discusses these issues from a Native perspective is crucial, because it makes Native Americans the experts in representing their own experiences.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of “Accolades of Endurance” is in how it frames Native American communities. Native American culture is celebrated for being vibrant and diverse. The emphasis on modern celebrations of historic traditions is also compelling. The visitor typically sees--and hears--the Powwow diorama before any other aspect of the exhibits

about Native Americans. However, the modern components of the Powwow have been updated several times to fit the narrative that Native people and their traditions are still relevant. These changes might be superficial--a change to the laptop or hairstyle of some of the modernly attired figures--but it results in an understanding that Native people exist in the present day (Figure 6.15). That the exhibit looks similar, but different, to the one I first saw as a child is a testament to its timelessness and reinforces in the visitor the idea that Native cultures have survived while they have also changed.



*Figure 6.15.* The Powwow diorama at the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History. The modern laptop on the table is one example of periodic updates made to the exhibit.

The more conventionally formatted exhibits about Native Americans follow the “geographical exhibit” archetype (A. Cobb 2005:459) and focus on how Native Americans interacted with varying environments. While European contact is discussed in several sections of this portion of the exhibits, this information is not as detailed as it is in “Accolades of Endurance”. However, notable exceptions include the Ghost Dance, which is described as having been specifically performed to “send the White man back to Europe”, and labels that discuss the

Louisiana Purchase. The exhibit labels do not employ evasive language in the same way as the previously discussed label at the Pineville Public Museum, but many of the older exhibits also do not explicitly mention contact. Instead, the older exhibits focus on presenting specific moments in past Native American societies, including craft production and specific rituals. In the section about the Northwest coast, one of the miniature dioramas has been darkened so that a visitor cannot readily view it or its accompanying label. However, it is possible to read it with the flashlight on a cell phone. This miniature is about the supposed ‘Cannibal Dance’ performed by some Native groups on the Northwest Coast. However, its exact meaning and context are unclear. Further, scholars debate about whether or not human flesh was actually consumed (McDowell: 1997). The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History decided to take this miniature diorama off of display because it dealt with such a controversial topic and furthered the stereotype of Native Americans as primitive and bloodthirsty. While the use of “Accolades of Endurance” as a framing narrative is laudable, the older exhibits could benefit from the inclusion of a more nuanced approach to concepts of identity, a discussion of the ramifications of colonialism on Native groups, and an increased dedication to presenting Native Americans descendants and culture as dynamic. Otherwise, the concept of Native Americans as a living people becomes somewhat lost as a visitor journeys through the institution and experiences museum fatigue and seemingly conflicting narratives.

#### *The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

The structure of the exhibits at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology provides it with several unique opportunities and challenges that are not seen in institutions with more conventional approaches to curation. First is the issue of the main floor’s use of visual storage (Figure 6.16). Presenting objects in a setting almost entirely devoid of context does allow

visitors to operate under conditions free from curatorial bias. However, it also encourages a purely aesthetic appreciation for particular objects. While this is not necessarily an issue in and of itself--consider for example, art museums--it is somewhat problematic in this context. If the goal of museums is to advocate for accurate and meaningful representation of Native Americans, and Native American culture, then divorcing these objects from those contexts is problematic. It also perpetuates the myth that there are no more Native Americans still participating in the production of pre-contact crafting methods, such as pottery or basket making. The exhibit case next to the visible storage area focuses on the discipline of anthropology. However, one of the major topics that it ignores is the role that racism and eugenics played in the development of particular subdisciplines of anthropology, specifically in physical anthropology. Additionally, the use of the plaster cast of an indigenous man from Central America is somewhat problematic because of its origin. The NCCMA's collection includes an accession from a physical anthropologist who went to Central America to take plaster casts of indigenous men to use as examples of particular racial phenotypes. The men who posed for these casts were coerced into participation and were not compensated. Further, the use of a bust of an indigenous man furthers the idea that Native Americans and other indigenous peoples are "exotic or other" (A. Cobb 2005:489).





*Figure 6.16. A view of the visible storage space at the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

The temporary exhibits have historically not included depictions of specific individuals in either dioramas or in photographs. This is largely because most of the temporary exhibits have one central theme, such as communication or animals. However, this is changing. As Steve indicated, recent exhibits have made more of an effort to focus on social justice issues. Currently, there are two exhibits that focus on race and how it has historically been treated at the NCCMA. The first of these is an exhibit in the smaller of the two galleries on the first floor. This exhibit focuses on cultural appropriation, both at the NCCMA and in society as a whole. Between the 1930s and 1970s, several students and professors at New Canton College would wear objects such as jewelry and clothing from the ethnographic collections as part of various projects. In one notable example from the 1940s, two undergraduate women put on various necklaces and

addresses as part of a photoshoot. As the exhibit's primary label articulates, "these photographs [...] are shocking for their blatant cultural appropriation and misappropriation" (Figure 6.17).



Figure 6.17. The primary label from the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology's exhibit on cultural appropriation.

Similarly, the current temporary exhibit in the second floor gallery also focuses on race as depicted by particular aspects of the NCCMA's past exhibits. Since the 1930s, there have been large murals in the upper gallery that depict human evolution in a very linear, and stereotypical, way. These murals were commissioned by the college in the 1930s, and begin with 'man discovering fire' and continue clockwise around the room to show the progression of human cultural evolution ending with a placid scene of several Native Americans sitting on a river bank. The most recent temporary exhibit on the second floor critically examines these murals and contextualizes them within the history of anthropology and museology. Entitled "Science, Art, Stereotype," it focuses on both the history of these murals at the NCCMA, and a critical examination of the predominant attitudes that White curators had about Native American

subjects, with specific mention of the idea of the noble savage trope (Ellingson 2001). This includes labels about ethnocentrism where it is stated that:

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, most anthropologists embraced the idea that race was solely biological. They judged non-white ‘races’ as less advanced intellectually and culturally. They also held a romantic idealization of the state of innocence or naivete these “others” once possessed. Such attitudes are evident in museum’s depiction of *The Algonquin* mural.

The label also includes a picture of the corresponding mural that is hanging above the exhibit case (Figure 6.18). This exhibit is unique among those examined in that it encourages museum visitors to examine the biases of past staff members of the NCCMA. While the staff of the NCCMA has historically used these murals as a teaching tool, this exhibit takes these ideas further and actively centers anthropologists’ past racial biases as vital to understanding how Native Americans were portrayed in the past, and why this has historically impacted how non-Native peoples have continued to be depicted by museums. The exhibit explores how Native peoples have been traditionally barred from telling their own stories, and why this continues to be an issue. These candid discussions of race and racism in anthropology and museums are evidence that Intersectional approaches to exhibit design can be utilized in effective and compelling ways.

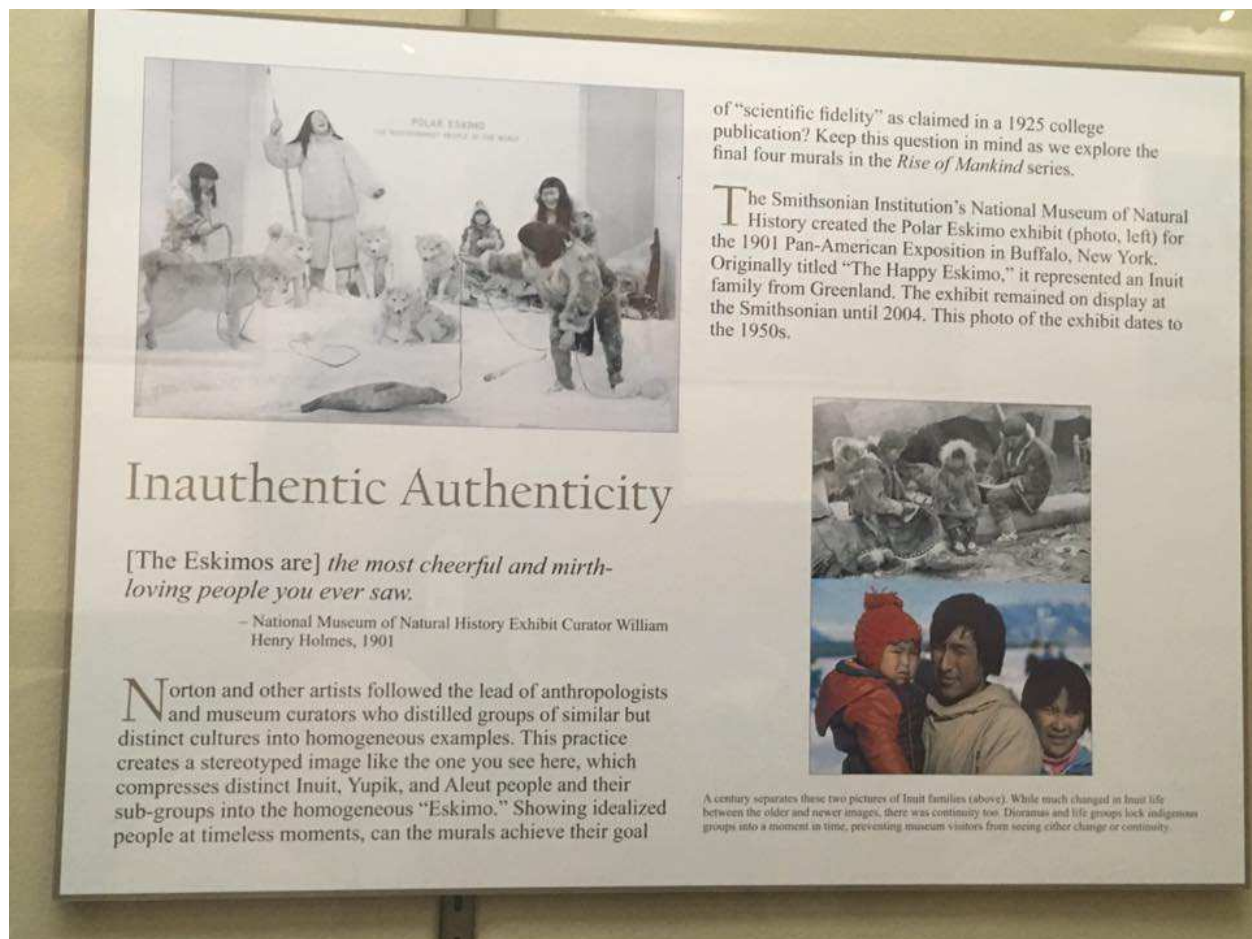


Figure 6.18. This label directly discusses some of the past biases of anthropologists and museum professionals as part of a current New Canton College Museum of Anthropology's exhibit.

## Community Curation

The Abel Public Museum, the Pineville Public Museum, the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History, and the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology all utilize a multivocal approach to community curation in their temporary and permanent exhibits. The larger museums, The PPM and the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History, have designed some exhibits for particular communities. However, this is still relatively rare. There are a few likely reasons for this. First, is the issue of audience. As previously discussed, each museum professional had particular notions about which group or groups of people were included in their institution's concept of 'audience'. At the larger institutions, the PPM and the Wisconsin Museum of Natural

History, audiences were largely conceptualized as being ‘the general public’. While both institutions have traditionally worked with Native American groups in other parts of the state, many of their exhibits focus on descendant communities that are better represented within the immediate area. For example, of the four museums examined, the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History has engaged in the largest amount of community curation. However, even though the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History is considered to be one of Wisconsin’s largest museums, the descendant community of Native Americans in the surrounding city is relatively small. Recently, most of the exhibits that have been curated in conjunction with a particular community have been developed with a larger local community, such as the city’s Black or Muslim populations. Conversely, in the case of the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology and the Abel Public Museum, the audiences are seen as being relatively narrow—the New Canton College students and faculty, and the small town of Abel respectively. These particular notions about who constitutes a given institution’s audience often result in fairly consistent and predictable institutional approaches to community curation. In the case of the larger institutions, exhibits tend to focus on broad appeal that has value for people from diverse backgrounds. However, this large approach to the concept of audience is often predicated upon specific notions about ‘the average’ audience member (Haraway 1983). Given the androcentric and Eurocentric nature of Western culture, this typically results in the privileging of White male experiences as standard. As such, institutions may see exhibits outside these parameters as being too specialized to have broad appeal for their ‘diverse’ audience. However, the smaller museums have a similar issue with their conceptualizations of audience. When an institution sees its audience as being fairly narrow, the result is that exhibits continue to be made for that narrow definition of an audience. Thus, despite both larger and smaller institutions having opposite ideas of who their

audiences are, the result is that both types of institutions are less likely to engage in community curation because of similar concerns about relevance and accessibility. However, this way of thinking can often result in museums and museum professionals upholding these views about their audiences due to confirmation bias. If museum professionals conceptualize their audience as being composed, or not composed, of a specific demographic, this will likely impact their curatorial choices. If, for example, a museum considers their largest audience demographic to be White men, they are more likely to continue curating exhibits that appeal to White men. However, this content might not be as accessible or interesting to other groups. Therefore, these groups will be less likely to visit museums. This results in the largest represented demographic—in this instance, White men—being viewed as those most intrinsically interested in visiting museums regardless of exhibit focus.

The second reason for this lack of community-curated exhibits is likely due to issues of object availability. All four of institutions involved in this study either utilized existing collections in their exhibits, or fabricated new replicas or dioramas of known historical objects. All four museum professionals acknowledged the importance of utilizing museum collections in storytelling. For some, like Angela, using objects as a way of educating and inspiring people to be conscious caretakers of history was one of the main purposes of museums. Steve also mentioned the importance of using New Canton College's objects, because he felt that there was something "fundamentally engaging" about items that were "so old and authentic". However, he also noted the difficulties in object-based curation, stating that museums professionals are "trapped by the collections that they have." While it is possible to create a community curated exhibit with museum objects, many times the community is more interested in focusing on current concerns (Phillips 2002:158).

Another reason for lack of community curation, or reluctance to engage in it, is due to complications in institutional policies or governance. Each of the curatorial processes at the institutions examined was subject to different procedures. For example, while each institution did have a board of directors that was ultimately responsible for approving exhibits, the degree of involvement varied significantly. Angela and Tom both indicated that their boards of directors were fairly noninterventionist. In contrast, Natasha felt that her board was very involved and often somewhat unreceptive to new ideas. Steve fell somewhere in the middle, indicating that the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology was governed by the New Canton College Board of Trustees, an organization that varied significantly, depending on individual committee members and current events at the college. In addition to larger governing bodies, the museum professionals interviewed had differing levels of professional autonomy. Since both Tom and Angela were directors, in addition to being curators, they were able to make executive decisions about curation. Steve and Natasha, however, often had to receive approval from their institution's director. Steve indicated that his director was often fairly lenient, however, Natasha felt that hers could be somewhat reluctant to make changes. Another policy that often resulted in complications to efforts to engage in community curation was the number of people involved in designing an exhibit. In addition to receiving permission from governing bodies and directors, exhibits at the PPM and the Wisconsin Museum of Natural History were often designed by multiple individuals who contributed particular elements to an exhibit. Both Tom and Natasha felt that it was important to be able to work with these individuals but, viewpoints often differed about how something should be curated. As a result, Natasha admitted that she "often felt constrained" by the process of group consensus, especially since several of her peers did not view community curation as necessary.

### *The Abel Public Museum*

When developing the current exhibits about Native Americans, Angela did consult multiple representatives of tribes throughout the state of Wisconsin. She also indicated that she was unsure if her predecessors did the same, though it seems unlikely. The Abel Public Museum does acknowledge the importance of working with descendant communities, as well as allowing Native Americans to tell their own stories. However, they also favor more conventional approaches to curation because, according to Angela, it “fits better with the institution’s audience and mission”. The implications of this statement are telling because it demonstrates that she, like many of the other museum professionals interviewed, still considers Native American history to be specialty or “outsider” history to some degree (Davalos 2001:8-12). Although the current exhibits feature several modern examples of traditional Native American crafts or garb, there is little discussion about specific community members who contributed to the museum. However, the exhibit does make specific mention of existing Native communities and draws a distinct connection between tribes that live in other parts of the state and their prehistoric ancestors who inhabited the area.

### *The Pineville Public Museum*

The Pineville Public Museum strives to incorporate the experiences of descendant communities whenever possible. This is true for both temporary and permanent exhibits. The PPM’s permanent exhibits were designed and implemented with the aid of multiple tribal leaders from descendant communities. This ensured that Native Americans were consulted at every level of the exhibit curation process. It also ensured that the exhibits focused on telling the history of Native Americans in a way that they were comfortable with. It is worth noting that there were female tribal elders, but the majority were male. This might have also influenced the portrayal of



women in the PPM's exhibits. In comparison to several other institutions, the Native American characters in the Pineville Public Museum were more likely to be named. Those exhibitions also focused somewhat on the relationships between Native Americans and White settlers. This included an increased emphasis on the experience of Metis people as well. The exhibits do include acknowledgments thanking all of the members of the tribes who contributed their time to making sure that the exhibit was curated in a way that was thoughtful and representative of their cultural experiences. However, there was otherwise little mention of existing Native American groups. In fact, any mention of Native Americans ends at the Fur Trade portion of the exhibits. As a result, it gives the impression that the community either died out or assimilated during European contact.

#### *The Wisconsin Museum of Natural History*

Natasha stated that "Accolades of Endurance" was developed in conjunction with the participation of multiple individuals from diverse Native American tribes. Because of this, it focuses specifically on Native American representation and experiences. The exhibit includes multiple large acknowledgement sections that name those who helped contribute money and content to the exhibit's installation. It also includes a number of themes that are somewhat controversial; specifically it discusses the negative impacts that European contact had on Native Americans. Additionally, the exhibit includes oral histories and anecdotes about Native Americans who live on reservations or have other insight about what it means to be Native American. Although these recordings are several decades old, they still show that indigenous people are a relevant and vibrant community. This was one of the most important aspects of the WMNH's curation process. According to Natasha, the staff at the WMNH felt that it was especially important to demonstrate to visitors that Native Americans were living, breathing

people, and not just relics of the past. Natasha directly acknowledged the value of her experiences in working with Native American groups stating, “[it] was transformative for me, just in terms of making me realize how critical it is to listen.”

*The New Canton College Museum of Anthropology*

Currently, the only exhibit that focuses on Native Americans is the exhibit about the murals on the second floor. While this exhibit does discuss how racism has historically impacted the representation of Native Americans in museum exhibits, this is not an example of community curation because it did not involve the direct participation of descendant communities. However, there are multiple examples of community curation in the NCCMA nonetheless. While Steve is responsible for installing several temporary exhibits each year, there are also other exhibit cases that are curated or co-curated by students. These include object studies and special projects that students develop in conjunction with the Museum Studies program. According to Steve, The NCCMA as an institution is open to the idea of incorporating either multivocal or community-based exhibits to its temporary exhibits, but it considers its primary audience to be the students of New Canton College. As such, priority is given to them.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

It has been established by a number of previous studies that the public trusts museums more than most other institutions or sources (Cameron 2007:67-68; Conn 2006:69-74; Falk and Dierking 2016:85-89). As such, museums have a particular kind of authority in the ways they represent the phenomena of history and science. While the role of museum professionals is often not considered when people visit museums, the choices of a curator or exhibit designer still make a specific impression (MacDonald 2002). Thus, museum professionals can be seen as having a great deal of influence over the opinions and beliefs of the public. Even if visitors do not read exhibit labels (Alt and Shaw 1984:25-36; Bitgood and Patterson 1993:761-781), it is still likely that they will retain some information about particular exhibit components such as dioramas or interactive features (Screven 1992:183-185). Additionally, tours, educational programming, and other kinds of interactions on or offsite will also likely impact visitors' knowledge about these topics (Alt and Shaw 1984;Davalos 2001: 175-182).

Many visitors to museums in the United States are situated in a society that correlates gender with both biological and behavioral traits (Hein 2010:58-59; Mills 2010:87-89). As such, these visitors often look for context clues when determining the gender of a particular figure in a museum exhibit. Secondary sexual traits such as breasts or facial/body hair are assumed to indicate a particular gender (Bünz 2012; Katriel 2010). Similarly, costuming and performative tasks are also considered to be markers of gender (Butler 1990) . While these ideas are obviously rooted in the visitors' preconceived notions of gender norms, the ways in which curators chose to represent genders and ethnicities may either reinforces or challenges these stereotypes. However, since the general public does not always critically examine their own biases, they are unlikely to

consider those represented in an authoritative institution like a museum (Hein 2010:53-54). As a result, visitors assume that the representation of particular groups within museums is authentic and “True” (Cain 2008:1143-1144).

While the most obvious consequence of this is that these representations may or may not be historically accurate, other complications are involved as well. Indeed, this thinking ultimately perpetuates a lack of critical examination of gender and ethnicity (Hein 2010; Katriel 2010) and how these factors ultimately relate to identity formation. As such, traditionally marginalized perspectives continue to be taken for granted, as they do not fit in with the socially dominant narrative structure. This results in both passive and active silencing of women, ethnic minorities, and LGBT individuals (Anderson and Winkworth 1991; Mills 2010; Bergsdóttir 2016).

This chapter focuses on the concepts of bias, authority, and truth and how curatorial professionals conceptualize these topics. I first examine how curators’ views of internalized versus externalized bias impact their perceived role as members of a given community. Next, I consider how the idea of bias is linked to a disciplinary conceptualization of several kinds of authority. From there, the two issues of bias and authority are examined to explore what museum professionals interviewed as a part of this study consider to be a successful approach to curation of Native American museum exhibits. I then discuss how these particular concepts directly impact how these four museum professionals continue to uphold specific structures that oversimplify the Intersectional identities of multiple groups of people. Finally, I provide some examples of how museum exhibits can be made more Intersectional by focusing on specific theories and practices that are more inclusive while still maintaining attributes that these four curators consider vital for a successful exhibit.

## **Bias**

When discussing curatorial philosophies, the concept of bias was especially significant. All of the museum professionals interviewed felt that museums had a strong obligation to the public to present historical information in the most accurate way possible. When asked why this was the case, Angela said “Because [the public] trusts [museums] to be honest and historically factual.” This sentiment was echoed by the others, and Tom added that, because of this, he viewed it as an “institutional responsibility” that “significantly influences” the way he engages in curation. In this way, institutional obligation directly impacted people’s perceptions of their roles as museum professionals. Not only did they believe that their museum had the moral responsibility to be honest, factual, and unbiased, but they also felt that they themselves were directly accountable for representation in the exhibits that they curated.

One of the most striking aspects of the conceptualization of bias was the idea of internalized versus externalized bias. When first asked about bias and representation in museums, three of the four museum professionals that I interviewed were quick to mention the depiction of Native Americans in popular culture. Both Tom and Natasha stressed that their exhibits were an attempt to acknowledge that Native Americans are still around, since a significant portion of White museum visitors consider Native cultures and peoples to be extinct (Dunbar-Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker 2016). Angela also brought up the idea of stereotypes and the importance of addressing the idea that “not all Native Americans lived in teepees”. Thus, all four museum professionals first conceptualized bias as a viewpoint their audience had that needed to be addressed through education and attention to accurate representation of Native peoples. These assertions are correct, and are further validated by literature that demonstrate this to be the case (Hollinshead 1992; Turner 2011). Generally, the museum professionals felt that it was their

responsibility to correct misinformation, especially when it had been used to discriminate against Native Americans in the past. All of them felt very strongly about this, both from a personal and professional standpoint. To them, bias was a kind of external force that resulted in ignorance, erasure, and harmful stereotypes. This was in direct contrast to the perceived value of community curation which was to educate and inform a White, or otherwise non-Native, audience. While this corresponds closely to Natasha's views, both Tom and Angela are a bit more skeptical about museum professionals' ability to overcome bias. Angela admitted that this is due to some degree to "uncertainty about cultural differences" as well as the idea that "history doesn't change, but the way we interpret it does".

Because of this concept of bias as an external force, most museum professionals did not think about the concept of their internalized bias until prompted by specific lines of questioning. Of those interviewed, Steve was the only one who really considered his Intersectional embodiment to be indicative of a particular internalized bias. The other three curators acknowledged the role that specific factors played in influencing their identities, but ultimately felt that they were still able to effectively curate an exhibit about other cultures. Perhaps because of their experiences working with Native groups in the past, all of the museum professionals interviewed were in favor of some level of community curation. They all felt that descendant communities should play a role in developing exhibits about their history and culture. However, those willing to relinquish curatorial control were also those who were the most skeptical about the ability of individuals and institutions to overcome bias. More specifically, the more the curators believed that internalized biases dictated curation, the more likely they were to advocate for community involvement. Additionally, interviewees differed in their views about what bias looked like in exhibits. Tom and Angela both acknowledged that their perspective as White

people was a factor that influenced their approach to curation. However, they ultimately viewed it as a kind of hurdle to overcome with the aid of a multivocal approach to exhibit curation. Steve disagreed, however, noting that “my identity probably impacts my life more than I’d like to admit. For example, the kinds of exhibits that I’m interested in making. [My female colleagues] have been really good about telling me when I’m focusing too much on ‘boy things’ [...] like weapons.” To contrast further, Natasha felt that internalized bias was the result of seeing people as a particular race or gender first. For her, the idea that “people are people” and all cultures need to be treated with respect and equality was a sufficient framework to avoid incorporating her specific cultural positionings into the exhibits that she helped to curate.

### **Authority**

As previously discussed, one of community curation’s ultimate goals is to subvert the idea that museums, and their Western knowledge systems, are superior to other epistemologies. As Amanda Cobb notes, “the new museology throws the authority of museums into question, thus subtracting some [...] of their power” (2005:487). However, the desire to remove a degree of curatorial authority from museums and museum professionals is a source of controversy within the field. In fact, among the museum professionals that I interviewed, the loss of this authority was cited as being the major reason why museum professionals were hesitant to engage in less traditional curatorial methodologies, specifically those that focused on Indigenous knowledge systems. When asked to provide elaborate further, Tom noted that he feels like “the desire to include [Native groups and other traditionally disenfranchised groups] is important. But, as with anything else, it’s a balancing act...[S]ometimes it seems like the pendulum can swing too far in the opposite direction.”

Angela echoed these sentiments, noting “because museums are unbiased, or supposed to be unbiased, we have the unique ability to tell these stories in a way that is factual.” For her, community curation was also an extremely valuable tool, but she was hesitant about using community-based curatorial methods in her museum. “Part of the reason for that,” she added “is because of our audience. They’re here to be educated, of course, but a lot of them aren’t the most culturally aware people.” She added that at the Abel Public Museum, she felt that it was more important to provide the predominately White museum viewers with historical and cultural context for the Native Americans who lived in the area. Elaborating further, she noted “I think what we have to do is to be careful to recognize that we don’t have to tell everything. We have to be inclusive and talk to the people we are representing [...] We also have to remember our audience.” She also clarified that there was a difference between being a Native American museum and a public museum, and that it was impossible to “be everything to everyone”. The Abel’s size and resources were generally seen as a further constraint against including representations of gender-nonconforming individuals, however, there does not seem to be an especially strong correlation between museum size and the willingness of a museum professional to engage in community curation. For example, Tom’s institution is medium-sized with a corresponding audience size. However, he and Angela (who works at a small museum with a small audience) have similar views about community curation and its relationship with bias and authority. Both of them stress the importance of working with communities, especially traditionally disenfranchised communities, but they are also concerned about a loss of curatorial authority. As Tom noted, “[w]e want to educate people, but my expectations for [what that means] for the general public are pretty low, which I think is realistic.” Natasha was also concerned about audience noting that, “it’s important to consider what’s accessible to people. I



mean, here, we have all kinds of people visiting. So we have to be sure to appeal to everyone [...] People need to feel like it's their museum; that ownership is critical." For Natasha, community curation did have the potential to alienate an institution's audience. She was hesitant to employ less commonly utilized curation methods noting:

You can't go into this zone where people are uncomfortable with it. They have expectations. You have to meet them to a certain degree. You don't have to kowtow to every aspect of their expectations, but you have to give them an understanding in which to start their discussion.

She discussed the National Museum of the American Indian and how the conceptual and contemporary nature of its initial exhibits disappointed a number of museum visitors who were looking for more object-based approaches to exhibit design.

Most of the museum professionals used their relationship with their audience as a way of explaining specific curatorial choices and methodologies. The relationship between the museum professional and the museum's audience is complex, but it was ultimately framed by three of the four museum professionals interviewed for this study as being an authoritative/didactic relationship with the museum and its staff seeking to educate the uninformed masses. The exception to this was Steve, who viewed his audience as being a bit more savvy and informed. As such, this likely impacts his willingness to engage in more community-based curation or other 'nontraditional' museology techniques. Since he considers his audience is generally more responsive to these sorts of issues than the audiences of the other institutions, Steve is comfortable with exploring more complex topics including a variety of social issues. Thus, it is probable that his faith in his audience's ability to understand these issues also correlates with his willingness to relinquish more curatorial control than the other curatorial professionals. However, it is equally probable that these views stem from his perception about the function of curatorial authority. As previously discussed, those who were more willing to explore their own

internalized biases were also more willing to acknowledge the benefits of community-curation, and the pitfalls of noncollaborative museology. Steve also notes that he believes that “you’re more likely to get an exhibit of broader appeal [if you use community curation]” mainly because the diversity of perspectives increases the quality of the exhibit.

It should be noted that Steve’s responses about the function of museums also differed somewhat from those of the other participants. In addition to the inclusion of ideas about education and collections care, he also discussed how museums have historically worked as institutions that uphold and replicate specific cultural values and norms in a given society. His views about museums were, overall, more critical than those of his peers. Angela, Tom, and Natasha all discussed the function of museums in modern contexts. Their answers had multiple commonalities, however, one particular aspect was especially notable. Angela, Tom, and Natasha’s conceptualization of museums all revolved around the idea of caretaking and education.

The idea of museums as caretakers is certainly not new (Nash and Feinman 2003). However, the ways in which this view manifests itself in particular museums and museum professionals is distinct (MacDonald 2002). In addition to the idea of collections stewardship, museum professionals are also seen as engaging in educational stewardship, or the educating of the general public. For these museum professionals, this last point is especially significant. Angela, Tom, and Natasha all mentioned that one of the primary functions of a museum was to educate people and inspire a love of history, science, and culture in future generations. For them, the predominant role of museum professionals, then, is to teach and inspire. When combined with collections’ care, this helps elucidate how these museum professionals conceptualize their role within museums as institutions. Essentially, these museum professionals see themselves as

as wardens of cultural knowledge that is replicated by the institutional and authoritative structure of museums. Because this knowledge is predicated upon specific cultural frameworks that determine what is relevant, or, perhaps more accurately, what is “True”, institutional authority is seen as a vital structure for the museum professionals interviewed. A museum’s possession of knowledge is seen as significant cultural capital and this helps to create the authority that museum professionals often allude to. The act of distributing this knowledge to a museum’s audience perpetuates this concept of institutional authority. It, therefore, establishes a particular hierarchy based on expert knowledge that separates the museum from its audience, with the museum’s perceived authority creating the illusion of a gulf of cultural expertise. Because museum professionals function as mouthpieces of the museum itself, they too benefit from the respect that is derived from this difference in cultural knowledge. Therefore, although Western culture and epistemology creates a museum’s institutional authority, these museum professionals also see it as an inevitable aspect of possessing more cultural capital than a given museum’s audience. Because the concept of authority is so entrenched within these museum professionals’ conceptualizations about the function of museums, and of themselves, this furthers the notion that curatorial authority is vital to historic or scientific Truth. It also enhances the perceived gap between museums and their audiences, which creates more of a sense of urgency in regards to maintaining curatorial authority. As Angela explained, “[community curation] can be a dangerous path because history never changes, peoples’ interpretations and perceptions of it does. I think it’s important to have the voices at the table but, I think, in the end, there has to be one voice that pulls those together and it really does need to be the voice of the expert.”

## Implications

All four museum professionals navigate the concepts of bias and authority in order to help construct and maintain a perception of their role within a given institution. As such, they have very specific ideas about what constitutes a successful exhibit. However, given the degree to which these museum professionals see their specific careers as being morally situated, these concepts of bias and authority are also especially relevant. The findings of this study indicate that this particular moral position is a phenomenon that arises from the set of caretaking responsibilities associated with curation and museum work in general. In other words, while most people undoubtedly consider performing one's job well to be important, these four museum professionals take it one step further. In many instances, they see their ability to effectively curate an exhibit, especially one about traditionally marginalized groups, to be a sort of moral obligation.

As a result, these museum professionals view their roles as educators to be especially relevant in these particular circumstances. They actively want to present Native Americans and other subaltern groups in a way that is morally consistent with their conceptualization of their roles within the constructs of institutional authority. This includes a dedication to sensitivity and, perhaps more importantly, a commitment to the concept of authenticity or Truth. The sociocultural construction of authenticity in museum contexts has been explored in length (see for example: Prentice 2001; Chhabra 2008). However, there is little doubt that museums and their audiences place a value on this construction. Authenticity is replicated in a variety of ways, however, each of the museum professionals interviewed stressed how important it was. Notably, they also framed it as contingent upon the issue of bias. More specifically, three out of four museum professionals felt that a less biased exhibit would be more likely to display Native

American ways of life in a more authentic way. Given that bias was universally considered to be negative, or, at the very least, problematic, this furthers the idea that the museum professionals interviewed see authenticity is the ultimate virtue in curation.

When asked further about how each museum professional ensured that exhibits were authentic, there were several different answers. First, all four of the museum professionals who had developed exhibits that focused on the historicity of specific Native American ways of life utilized primary sources in their depictions. Tom, in particular, mentioned that he utilized historic paintings and ethnographic accounts of missionaries who had first made contact with Native peoples. Angela and Natasha both echoed this, and Steve also discussed the usefulness of this type of documentation. However, there are also significant limitations to relying on these types of sources that were not discussed. One telling example occurred when I was interviewing Tom. I asked him specifically about whether or not he had thought about including depictions of Two-Spirited or otherwise gender-nonconforming individuals. He indicated that he had thought about it, but ultimately decided against it because “there was no evidence that Two-Spirited people existed in the tribe [that the exhibit was meant to depict].” While this may be the case, it does put a significant amount of faith in the initial accounts of the missionaries and other historical accounts provided by White colonizers. Given that they were coming from the perspective of an androcentric culture that had a very distinct set of gender roles (Buffalohead 1983; Whitehead 1981:85-86). If these missionaries and settlers were confronted with an individual that did not fit within their strict conceptualization of gender, then it is possible that they might not have understood the nuances of a particular person’s identity or even recognized that such persons were present in the community. Further, the androcentric nature of these first examples of documentation can be seen in the level of attention paid to men versus women.

Because the accounts were written by men, and came from a misogynistic and androcentric culture, they likely assumed that the men were participating in very ‘male’ tasks and displayed a certain amount of authority over the women and children, regardless of whether or not this was actually the case (Whitehead 1981; Hein 2010). Ethnographic observation of existing descendant communities was also frequently utilized in the development of Native American exhibits. Each of the museum professionals mentioned that anthropological studies of descendant communities were helpful, as were studies that focused on other hunter-gatherer groups. However, Natasha and Steve both acknowledged that there were some significant limits to these sources’ usefulness. As Steve pointed out, “you’re not always comparing apples to apples.”

Finally, narratives and histories presented by descendant communities were also used as sources for developing exhibits about Native Americans. While not all of the museum professionals directly utilized these narratives in their exhibits, they did mention that they felt that listening to Native Americans’ experiences was extremely valuable. However, the use of these narratives was ultimately seen as being useful, but not necessary for creating an authentic exhibit about Native Americans. Instead, they were more inclined to privilege accounts that came from more traditional--Western--ways of knowing. There is an expectation among many museum professionals, and other members of Western pedagogic traditions, that these particular sources are more scientific and internally consistent (Medicine 1983; Goeman 2008; Hein 2010). Because these properties have been equated with the concept of authority, museum professionals who rely on these knowledge systems often unknowingly assume that they are more authentic (Simpson 2012). And, more consequentially, these sources are seen as being “True”.

## Applications

When considering how these concepts directly impact museum professionals' curatorial philosophies and decisions more broadly, it is possible to observe why community curation is utilized in very particular ways. Given the general reluctance to relinquish curatorial authority expressed by the four museum professionals interviewed for this study, their resistance to engaging in a community-based approach to community curation is understandable. However, the proper application and consideration of Intersectional representation in museum exhibits can help to mitigate some of these concerns. Curatorial authority predominantly exists for two interconnected reasons. First, it helps navigate the ideas of bias, and second, it helps act as a structure through which cultural knowledge is replicated in particular ways. Intersectional Theory acknowledges bias as both an externalized and internalized perspective that harms people who embody particular intersections in varying ways. However, it ultimately asserts that marginalized groups must be seen as the experts in representations of their own experiences. The museum professionals interviewed agreed with this sentiment to varying degrees, but still felt that the ultimate issue with utilizing an entirely community-based approach is that it negates the tradition of cultural authority possessed by museums. Another significant concern relates to audience and their particular cultural situation.

Both of these issues are complex, and neither is especially easy to resolve. However, Intersectional Theory readily addresses both of them. In the case of curatorial authority, an application of Intersectionality to museum exhibits about traditionally marginalized groups is vital to understanding how museum exhibits can be improved in the future. While a fully Intersectional approach to exhibit curation might not be presently tenable, given current museum professionals' reluctance to give up authority, there are some practical steps that can be taken to

help improve Intersectional representation. First, figures who represent characters of multiple intersecting spheres of identity should be depicted.

While most museums did include Native American women in their dioramas, these women were predominantly middle-aged. There were a few examples of older women or, at least, women with grey hair. However, most of the female characters were neither very young or very old. Relatedly, none of the characters were depicted as being physically infirm or disabled. There were also no depictions of Two Spirited, or otherwise gender-nonconforming individuals. Or, if there was, there was not sufficient discussion within exhibit labels to suggest that these figures were meant to represent this particular cultural phenomenon. Additionally, as Bünz notes in her studies at a Swedish museum, the women are generally depicted as being of a similar economic status (2012: 67). This lack of diversity in the portrayal of particular characters within museum exhibits does extend to exhibits about White cultures as well. However, most of the museums examined in this study had a significantly larger percentage of Native American figures than European American figures, even if they also had exhibits depicting European American culture. Therefore, this lack of diversity is much more noticeable in the Native American exhibits. An increased commitment to portraying more figures who embody differing Intersections of identity helps to demonstrate the true diversity that existed--and still exists--within Native American societies. It also helps mitigate the historical erasure of these groups of people (Bünz 2012: 66-67; . Cobb 2005: 488) and the perpetuation of the noble savage or stereotypical ideal of Native Americans of the past (Haraway 1984: 53). While a reluctance to include gender nonconforming individuals due to a lack of evidence was cited, it is important to acknowledge that it is still possible to include other examples of people who embody multiple Intersections of identity.



Another way in which museum exhibits can be more Intersectional is by challenging traditional narratives about the division of labor. As previously discussed, most of the museums followed a very stereotypical depiction of the division of labor within Native American exhibits where men were responsible for hunting and war, and women were responsible for gathering and raising children. While many museum professionals mentioned that they used ethnographic and historical sources to determine which particular tasks were performed by male or female participants, there are multiple issues with the reliability of these sources. Therefore, relying on traditional depictions of gender roles is inconsistent with museums' dedication to the concept of authenticity since the historicity of these divisions is questionable.

Finally, museums can be more Intersectional by dramatically changing the narrative structures of exhibits. Previous formats, such as the culture area, the history-period exhibit, the habitat exhibit, or the visible storage display, might provide some insight into Native American history, and culture, but it is shallow at best. Exhibits like those at the National Museum of the American Indian highlight how many exhibits that focus on Native American experiences fall short (Shannon 2014). When Native Americans were given almost complete curatorial control over exhibits, they chose to focus on concepts of identity that are not typically explored in a traditional museum exhibit (C. Cobb 2005: 500-503). This underscores the differences between what Native American community members want to say, and what museum professionals are saying about them in these exhibits. This radical approach to community curation is not without problems. As Cobb notes:

“[M]any visitors will find the new museological paradigm at work in the exhibitions unfamiliar and confusing. The unfamiliarities of the narrative structure and classification system in combination with stereotypical (and sadly racist) imaginings about Native Americans will inevitably lead to a certain amount of disappointment on the part of some visitors” (2005:503-504).

The issue of audience is especially significant to understanding how museum professionals utilize curatorial methodologies in a way that continues to uphold problematic structures that ignore Intersectional identities. As previously discussed, the museum professionals interviewed for this study justified particular curatorial decisions based on their perceived audience. They made assumptions about their level of education and cultural awareness, and made adjustments accordingly. However, the concept of audience becomes convoluted when viewed from an Intersectional perspective. Most museums in the state of Wisconsin are situated in communities where the vast majority of their visitors are not Native American. Therefore, these kinds of radical paradigmatic shifts are not seen as being particularly urgent concerns, even for curators who recognize the importance of community curation and an Intersectional approach to exhibit design. Further, as the museum professionals interviewed here discussed, museums are often seen as having particular obligations to their communities. As Angela pointed out, “we need to make sure that we’re talking about [topics] that the visitor is actually interested in.” When juxtaposing this sentiment with the reality that many institutions also have to rely on their communities for donations, volunteers, and other resources, this further discourages museum professionals from curating exhibits that feature controversial topics or unconventional curatorial strategies. However, that does not mean that more Intersectional exhibits are untenable for smaller institutions or institutions with a predominantly non-Native audience. Rather, it means that the particular Intersectional curatorial strategies that they employ require different considerations. Because smaller institutions often have a smaller audience and a smaller scope, they can often provide more concentrated information about a particular topic. Both the Abel Public Museum and the New Canton College Museum of Anthropology had smaller exhibit areas and, as a result, a larger percentage of their space was dedicated to

temporary exhibits. Utilizing this temporary exhibit space could allow these institutions, and institutions like them, to introduce complex and potentially controversial topics in a way that is accessible for its particular community. Temporary exhibits are especially useful in these circumstances, because they allow for museums to present information in a way that can build upon previous temporary exhibits. Further, temporary exhibits are often more able to tackle difficult or taboo topics, because any potential controversy is less likely to be permanently associated with that institution and its programming.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored how Intersectional Theory can be used in order to elucidate the ways in which White museum professionals at four different institutions in Wisconsin conceptualize their roles within museums and, by extension, how they view the representation of gender configurations in Native American cultures in the exhibits at their institutions. Given the racial composition of the museum field, it is likely that these viewpoints are widespread, however, further research is needed to conclude if this is an observable pattern at the regional or national level. I focused specifically on whether or not institutional and individual attitudes towards community curation significantly impact the representation of Native American women in exhibits in these Wisconsin museums. Based on interviews with museum professionals at four different institutions, I have shown that museum professionals' feelings about community curation are mostly contingent upon both their views regarding the role of museums and the role of museum professionals as caretakers of knowledge in a given institution. Factors such as race and gender identity were significant, but seemed to vary in how much they impacted curatorial choices. Instead, it is more accurate to state that the more museum professionals critically engaged with their own identity, the more likely they were to engage in Intersectional approaches to curation, including community-based curation. However, it is also important to note that all of the museum professionals interviewed were in favor of some level of community curation, despite the varying levels of critical engagement with their own identities and privilege.

By exploring Intersectional Theory, and its initial goals and development, it is possible to see how it directly applies to making museum exhibits more representative of diverse Native American experiences. Although Intersectional Theory was initially conceptualized by Black feminists, it has gained significant support in recent years in both academic and more

mainstream activist circles. Intersectional Theory has been applied to a variety of studies about exhibit design and other instances of representation within museums. It has also become increasingly popular in activist circles that are not directly affiliated with specific academic traditions.

In addition to Intersectional Theory, several other major bodies of literature informed this project. Perhaps the most significant are found within the field of post colonial theory and critical museology. By examining museological traditions that are constructed on Eurocentric, androcentric frameworks, critical museology acknowledges the importance of engaging with issues of representation. The literature on critical museology demonstrates the need for community curation as championed by multiple Native American scholars who focus on its importance. There are several notable examples of community curation in museums today, including the National Museum of the American Indian.

The subsequent sections of this project focused on specific institutions and museum professionals that worked at these institutions. First, comprehensive site descriptions were included to provide specific examples of how Native American women were represented in each museum. Then, the second section specifically focused on the museum professionals and how they conceptualized their role within the museum. Finally, overall gender, race, and community curation were all examined, both broadly and at each specific institution.

The next chapter dealt with how museum professionals navigate particular concepts in order to make sense of their role within a given institution. First, the concept of bias was explored. The museum professionals interviewed for this study understand bias to be a largely external force. This is one of the ways in which their role as curatorial professionals works to uphold existing structures of noncollaborative museology, including Eurocentrism. This

conceptualization of bias, then, shapes the concept of authority for the curators I interviewed. Since the museum professionals view their roles as being caretakers to varying degrees, constructing institutional authority becomes a particular aspect of the care of cultural knowledge.

The end result of these interacting concepts of bias and authority helps to simultaneously create and uphold existing museological structures and discourages White museum professionals more generally from critical reflection on their own positionality. Community curation is an effective way to address the inherent issues in these structures, but the museum professionals interviewed for this study are hesitant to fully engage in Community Curation because it requires relinquishing curatorial authority and may be seen as conflicting with other institutional missions, projects, and endeavors. Further research on this issue may reveal that this pattern is more widespread among the predominately White museum professionals in the United States. Additionally, these concepts of identity directly relate with how these museum professionals conceptualize authenticity. For these four museum professionals, a museum's primary function is to be authentic and "True". However, the concepts of "Truth" to which they alluded in their interviews are constructed and upheld by Western epistemological frameworks that privilege specific ways of knowing over others. As an example, the accounts of missionaries and explorers were often cited as primary sources of Native American ways of life. However, the accuracy of these reports is clearly questionable. Not only were these men writing from an outsider perspective about a culture that they knew nothing about, but they also often failed to record crucial information about the roles of women and children (Buffalohead 1983; Whitehead 1981). This, then, further emphasizes the need for museums to utilize community curation to develop exhibits that are more thoughtful about representation, especially of peoples who embody multiple interacting spheres of oppression.

In addition to a larger geographical or regional study, this project illuminates several areas for future research. First, it indicates the potential to engage additional demographics about these topics. Factors such as age, ability status, sexuality and gender identity are potential factors that can be evaluated to further determine the prevalence of these patterns among museum professionals from a variety of Intersectional identities. Specifically, examining the similarities and differences between how White museum professionals and Native American museum professionals curate Indigenous female subjects would be beneficial to explore further questions about the intersection of race and gender in museums. While this study focused on one museum professional at each institution, it is important to note that many institutions have multiple individuals who are responsible for making decisions about exhibit design and curation. As such, an increased emphasis on individuals who are involved in other steps of the exhibit design process in larger institutions would be beneficial.

Additionally, an analysis of archival records and other institutional correspondence about the development of particular exhibits could provide valuable insight into how museums as institutions have historically engaged in curation, and how they have (or have not) interacted with descendant communities when constructing exhibits. This could be used in tandem with visitor studies and observation to see how effectively particular meanings are conveyed within museum exhibits, especially when focusing on an Intersectional representation of Native American women and other traditionally disenfranchised groups. Further, while this project focuses on an Intersectional critique of museum exhibits, there are other elements of museums that would benefit from a similar examination. While exhibits are an obvious product of museums that can be made more Intersectional, the same is also true of educational programming, facility layout, or object curation and the day-to-day management of collections.

One of the most profound benefits of Intersectional Theory is that it acts as an interpretive framework through which it is possible to develop new and powerful approaches to complex social issues. A compelling example of this is in the field of social work. A 2010 volume edited by Lettie L Lockhart and Fran S Danis focuses on an Intersectional approach to domestic violence. The book includes multiple essays about how this social issue impacts various communities. In addition to focusing on domestic violence against Black women, and disabled women, it also examines domestic violence at the Intersection of LGBTQ issues. Each of the chapters explored how domestic violence manifests itself in these specific communities and provided examples of how social workers can employ strategies that are mindful of Intersectional concerns. For example, chapters that discuss Black or Latina experiences with domestic violence emphasize the historically contentious relationship that communities of color have had with law enforcement. In these instances, counselors of Women of Color who are victims of domestic abuse are encouraged to have their patients remove themselves from the situation without involving law enforcement officials if possible. This is because Women of Color are often hesitant to trust the police, and unlikely to involve them. Additionally, if they are involved in a domestic dispute, it is highly likely that the Woman of Color or her partner will be the victim of police brutality (Bent-Goodly et al 2010:67-98; Ramos et al. 2010: 209-230). These practices have been shown to increase the number of Women of Color who leave their abusive partners, because they feel more comfortable doing so without involving law enforcement (ibid).

Another instance where Intersectionality has been utilized to develop policies is in the Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates (AIWA) organization. As the name suggests, this group focuses on empowering and educating Asian Immigrant Women. One particular program, called the Community Transformational Organizing Strategy (CTOS), has recently been developed



focusing on Intersectional approaches to topics of social justice (Cho et al. 2013:802). The CTOS is described as “a leadership program that empowers immigrant women and youth to develop and take their leadership skills and knowledge to scale” (CTOS Program). Additionally, it “provides immigrant women and youth with the resources, tools and knowledge to be progressively and systematically more involved in AIWA and social justice work, and more civically engaged” (Ibid). One of the most significant ways that this program works at an Intersectional level is by providing English language learners with an English language curriculum that is specifically focused on “understand[ing] the link between language proficiency and workplace discrimination that is exacerbated by employer expectations that limited-English-speaking, low-income immigrant women will not resist exploitation or harassment” (Cho et al. 2013:802-803).

Both of these examples demonstrate how an Intersectional approach to social issues can aid in the development of innovative and substantive policies. Ultimately, what makes both of these examples successful is that they approach a given issue from a “bottom up” approach in order to ensure that those that are the most vulnerable to erasure are the first to be considered. Applying this same mentality to exhibit development within museums can be accomplished by actively considering both those who are being represented and those who view this representation. It is not simply enough to make the main characters of an exhibit female, Native American, or both (Bünz 2012). For museums and their exhibits to be truly Intersectional, museum professionals must actively engage with the most vulnerable communities through community curation. This means deliberately involving multiple diverse perspectives throughout the exhibit development process, including women, LGBTQ people, and people of varying ability levels. In addition to involving multivocal perspectives, it is crucial that museum

professionals design exhibits *about* traditionally marginalized people *for* traditionally marginalized people *by* consulting traditionally marginalized people and *involving* them as active participants in the design process. This means both exploring issues that are significant to these communities and engaging in curatorial strategies that centralize their experiences. However, in the case of the museum professionals interviewed, many have a preexisting concept of their audience and, unfortunately, Native Americans and other traditionally marginalized groups are often not considered to be part of that audience (Davalos 2001:6-15).

Because of this, it might be prudent for museum professionals to engage in diversity training so that they can stay more socially aware of how the world is changing around issues of identity, especially where they intersect with what, at the writing of thesis, is a very fluid and quickly changing public discourse about gender and sexuality. This is especially true for museum professionals who have not historically been exposed to Intersectionality and diverse expressions of race, gender, and other factors of identity. This echoes the American Alliance of Museums' commitment to diversity. As indicated by the Human Resources portion of their website, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) advocates for hiring people from diverse backgrounds. While this is similar to many other large organizations, the AAM also acknowledges that simply hiring women or People of Color is insufficient. Rather, they call for people to have open and engaged dialogues about social issues such as race and inequality (American Alliance of Museums Human Resources). While many large museums do encourage or require their staff to undergo inclusivity training, an increased emphasis for museum professionals who deal directly with issues of representation, particularly of traditionally marginalized groups, is crucial to developing more Intersectional museum exhibits.

Developing more Intersectional museum exhibits is something that all institutions can do, regardless of size and other resource constraints. These exhibits are powerful, because they provide traditionally marginalized groups with the potential to explore issues that directly impact them (Davalos 2001: 191-194; Malt 2006: 115). Ultimately, museums are political spaces that construct and perpetuate particular notions about who is considered to be an ideal citizen and who is considered to be ‘the Other’. The value of Intersectional exhibits is that they seek to challenge these assertions by acknowledging the complexity of human identity.

It is crucial to acknowledge that Native Americans, and other traditionally disenfranchised groups, are the experts of their own experiences. They are the ones best suited to answer questions about their identity. Museum professionals who want to be true stewards of education need to navigate their internalized biases in order to answer difficult questions about authority and authenticity. Making exhibits more Intersectional encourages everyone to examine the historically diverse groups of our shared humanity, and to work towards a future where everyone in those groups is represented.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Background Questions:

- When were the exhibits depicting Native Americans first installed?
- Were you involved with the initial development of the exhibits?
- How were the exhibits researched? What kinds of sources were used?
- Have the exhibits been changed or altered at all since their initial installation?

### Native American Involvement and Identity:

- Did you consult with any Native American groups when researching or constructing these exhibits?
- How did you decide which groups or individuals to contact?
- Were they willing to help/what was their reaction?
- How accurately do you think the exhibits demonstrate past Native American ways of life? How important is it that they do so?
- How accurately do you think the exhibits demonstrate present Native American ways of life? How important is it that they do so?
- How do you think this is different or similar to white or European American exhibits depicting the same time period, either those within your museum or museums that you've visited?

### Gender and Division of Labor:

- What kinds of activities are the men/women engaging in in your exhibits? What about the boys/girls?
- Do you think that this portrayal accurately represents how the kinds of activities and tasks that Native Americans engaged in in the past? Why or why not?
- Do you think that these kinds of tasks and activities have changed in Native American societies today? If so, why do you think that is the case? If not, why not?
- Is there a difference between how you depict gender in Native American exhibits versus European American exhibits?

### Curation Philosophy and Reactions to the Exhibits:

- Has there been any response from Native American organizations or feminist organizations?
- How has the public's reaction been?
- Is there anything about the exhibits that you feel should be changed, why or why not?
- What do you think is the function of museum exhibits?