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The 2020 Awakening: A Study On Exhibiting Topics of Race and Identity in Mid-Sized Art Museums

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Abstract

After the many racial injustices that occurred in 2020, cultural institutions have been motivated to educate the public on historical and contemporary topics of race and identity. This project sought to analyze exemplary cases of exhibition production with topics of race and identity in mid-sized art museums. The goal was to provide a set of recommendations for exhibiting these topics to bolster community trust. Two museums were studied–the Montclair Art Museum and Newark Museum of Art–which revealed that the exhibitions at both institutions were relevant to contemporary issues, engaging to their respective communities, and educational for a wide range of audiences.

Keywords: museums, race, identity, exhibitions, curator, critical race theory, systemic racism, community, document analysis, multi-case study, cross-case synthesis

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

The events of 2020 have largely impacted many aspects of American society. Most prominently in the cultural sphere, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked a surge of awareness and scrutiny concerning the ways public institutions such as museums uphold their values (Charr, 2020). The public watched as museums responded to these crises and the protests that followed. In Minneapolis, the Walker Art Center severed ties with the local police (Di Liscia, 2020). In Los Angeles, the Getty Museum's numerous social media posts in support of the Black Lives Matter movement were met with further protests towards the museum, referencing their history of racism (Charr, 2020). Similarly, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, a group of former employees wrote a public letter to condemn the museum's hypocrisy in showing support online for the movement but perpetuating inequities in the museum's own space (Lefebvre, 2020). In response to the social crises, museums have been forced to assess their foundational functions, addressing how their actions may or may not align with how they want to be perceived in society.

According to the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Code of Ethics, and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics, a museum's purpose encompasses public service, the human experience, and education (AAM, 2000; ICOM, 2017). Because of this, museums are increasingly focused on historical and contemporary accuracy when exhibiting sensitive themes such as topics of race and identity (O'Neill et al., 2019). In the past, art museums were primarily focused on producing exhibitions within the art canon (Simmons,

2016). The traditional art historical canon accounts for the artists and art movements that were deemed influential by academic institutions, most of which were based on the writings of scholars such as Pliny the Elder and Giorgio Vasari (Givens, 2019). The artists included in the canon were typically white male artists such as Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Titian, and those who rose to fame emulating these artists. In recent years, researchers in the field have questioned the ethics of this canon and the art history and museum field's adherence to its seminal artists (Reilly & Lippard, 2018). Finley (2019) quoted artist Kerry James Marshall's interview with the National Public Radio: "One of the reasons I paint Black people is because I am a Black person…There are fewer representations of black figures in the historical record." Marshall confronts the lack of people of color through his overt depiction of blackness in his artworks, stating that a complete overrepresentation of whiteness in the art historical cannon is apparent (Finley, 2019).

In this same regard, Bay Area professor Letha Ch'ien teaches a course called *Race and European Art* at Sonoma State University, which covers many limiting aspects of canonical artists such as Titian and Gaugin (Ch'ien, 2020). One example that Ch'ien uses is Titian's Sistine Chapel paintings, which are some of the most recognized works in the world. From a contemporary perspective, however, racist imagery is perceived in the works, as the Black figures are shown in positions of servitude. This example illustrates that many institutions are in the process of observing and rejecting racist imagery within the art history cannon presented at many museums (McGlone, 2020). Museums are beginning to recognize that displaying this specific imagery in these works upholds white supremacist values (McGlone, 2020), which does not align with their mission statements, nor to the codes of ethics that they pledge to adhere to as a part of the museum community (Jackson, 2020).

Science museums are also taking part in the conversation about race in cultural institutions. For example, the Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM) displays a permanent exhibition called *Race: Are We So Different?* which scientifically disproves the biological supremacy systems instilled through the concept of race. This exhibition is also a traveling exhibition which started as a collaboration between the American Anthropological Association and the SMM in 2007 and has since travelled to approximately 46 other institutions (Understanding Race, 2020). Joanne Jones-Rizzi, vice president of science, equity, and education of the SMM, and fellow museum professional Stacey Mann published a dialogue about museums and race called *Is That Hung White?* (Jones-Rizzi & Mann, 2020) The dialogue states that although museums have been having a conversation about inclusivity for multiple decades, the time is now for institutions of all subjects to take initiative and shift their practices.

Although the field is beginning to recognize the need to address systemic racism, significant restructuring needs to occur regarding the definition of a museum in contemporary society (Salguero, 2020). The museum as an institution is rooted in colonial ideology, which includes principles imbedded in *systemic racism*, which stems from the European museum model that most institutions emulate (Schubert, 2016; Simmons, 2016). According to Schubert (2016) and Simmons (2016) the *European museum model* is the museum structure which emphasizes white male academia and professionalism, stemming from the inception of museums in Europe during the 19th century. Systemic racism, also known as *institutional racism*, is the deeply-rooted bias evident in society that puts people of color at a disadvantage in every aspect of life, and is the basis of Critical Race Theory (Koppelmann, 2020). *Critical Race Theory* states that society is inherently racist because white people transformed *race* from a biological concept to a socially constructed concept to facilitate agendas that diminished people of color through various

institutions (Crenshaw et al., 1995). According to Sen (2020), this type of racism is evident most often in institutional, historical, and cultural settings. Sometimes this racism is not frequently overt or blatant, and is therefore harder to combat. Museums are facing a worldwide call to address colonialism because of their educational and activist value (Trouillot, 2020). Colonialism and systemic racism are evident through the hiring process, governing boards, grants, donations, programs, mission statement and community outreach, marketing, and public relations (Delgado et al., 2017). This can also lead to exhibitions that are subconsciously embedded with the same bias, which Reilly and Lippard (2018) states can be combatted through institutional activism.

One of the responsibilities of a museum is to educate the public (AAM, 2000). To do so, the public must be willing to trust the information that the museum presents (De Montebello et al., 2004). If a museum's exhibitions are imbued with racist principles, as Critical Race Theory suggests, the institution is not existing to the standard of their stated mission and multiple codes of ethics that guide the museum field (AAM, 2000; ICOM, 2017). The failure to uphold the ethics and values could potentially alienate audiences, especially BIPOC visitors (Wajid & Minott, 2019). According to Weller (1985), when a museum loses its audience, it loses its purpose, as the museum field is centrally focused on education and audience, and engagement is crucial if the field is to remain relevant in society (Simon, 2016). Doering (2020) states that museums will lose all societal relevance if they do not reshape their programs to enhance equity in Black, Latinx, and other disenfranchised groups. If programs continue to reflect the interests of donors and the board, rather than the interest of the community, the connection will be lost. Museums are also meant to be empathetic institutions, meaning that they evolve to the needs of the public and display an understanding of those needs (Gokcigdem, 2019). According to Gardner (2019), lack of empathy in an institution is an overall failure on the part of a museum

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because of the museum's duty to exude and facilitate empathy in humanity through layers of education and entertainment (American Alliance of Museums, 2000).

Structural issues related to systemic racism will take many years and considerable efforts to rectify, but museums can begin with smaller steps. Some of these steps can include efforts such as diversifying staff and board, revitalizing programs with inclusivity efforts (Willis, 2017), and reexamining the exhibition production processes to better exhibit topics of race and identity (Doering, 2020). This project specifically addressed the exhibitions relating to topics of race and identity in mid-sized art museums.

The Mapping Museums Blog (2018) noted that the Association of Independent Museums uses the following criteria for determining museum size: a small museum has up to 10,000 visitors annually, a medium or mid-sized museum has 10,001 to 50,000 visitors annually, and a large museum has over 50,001 visitors annually. Small and mid-sized museums historically have fewer resources available to them than larger museums, which puts these smaller institutions at a disadvantage regarding to renovation, conservation, and other opportunities that involve money (O'Hare, 2015). However, Pfeiffer (2019) notes that there are many benefits of being a smaller museum. Pfeiffer states that smaller museums tend to be closer to their communities; close enough to develop more thorough and tailored programs and exhibitions to fit the community's needs. This also allows these museums to easily discontinue programs that are not serving a community. Smaller museums are also adept at partnering with other organizations, because of the lack of resources available to fund many endeavors. This is an advantage because these museums constantly bring in outside knowledge, which can be beneficial to inclusivity efforts and expanding community Pfieffer (2019) emphasized that larger museums can learn from observing smaller museums because of the intimate and empathetic skillsets they develop in that

environment. Anti-racist curatorial work is one of the main factors in developing an institution (Gonzales, 2019). Studying the process at mid-sized art museums that have been working on this practice is crucial in benefiting the field as a whole.

Although the problem of systemic racism is evident across the museum field, the scope of this project is mid-sized art museums. Mid-sized art museums were chosen based on two criteria. First, mid-sized art museums were accessible for the time frame and scope of availability for this project. Second, smaller museums tend to be more flexible when it comes to responding to the needs of a community (Petersen, 2019)—therefore, the content at the museum would be suited for a study about exhibition production for community education purposes.

The Purpose of the Study

Presently, the museum field is working to end systemic racism within its institutions, because it is still embedded in the structure, causing consequences to programming and collections (Martinez, 2020). By examining the exhibitions in mid-sized art museums that are consistently producing successful exhibitions with topics of race and identity, the museum field as a whole can emulate these actions to connect further with a diverse set of visitors. In this study, the following research question was cultivated:

> **RQ:** How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and
> identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

To answer this research question, a qualitative multi-case study was executed. The exhibitions *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* at the Montclair Art Museum, and *Seeing Identity: 20th and 21st Century* at the Newark Museum of Art were investigated. Documents relating to the exhibition process and the programs in the museums were gathered,

which included website pages, articles, photographs, catalogues, and online reviews. These documents were analyzed using the open coding method and compared to each other using the cross-case synthesis method. The patterns from the case study were then compiled into a list of recommendations of actions that mid-sized art museums can take to build trust with their community regarding accurately displaying themes of race and identity. This research project sought to strengthen the programming and exhibition practice regarding race and identity.

Summary

Chapter 1 established the problem to be addressed in the museum field and explored the purpose of this study. The chapter stated that the museum field is looking to combat systemic racism following the racially-charged events of 2020. The chapter described that the museum field in general is based on colonial ideology because of the European museum model, which implies that systemic racism is still evident in its foundations. The consequence of this systemic racism begins with a loss of trust in the community, which is what a museum's success is based upon. This chapter also states that museums can take actions to rectify these issues, and this study will focus on the curatorial sector within the museum field, specifically curatorial activism in mid-sized art institutions. Chapter 2 examines the scholarly and professional literature related to this problem. The themes explored in this chapter are exhibiting different cultures and social issues, modern curatorial practice, and museum as a public institution. Chapter 3 explains the multi-case study methodology that was executed to answer the research question, which incorporated document analysis and cross-case synthesis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data related to this methodology, and Chapter 5 concludes the project with a set of recommendations for programming and exhibitions in the museum field. The following chapter details the review of the literature conducted for this research project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the problem of lingering colonialism within museums was addressed. This fact relates to all facets of institutional actions, including exhibition production. This project explored exhibition production within mid-sized art museums to assess how museums are currently combatting systemic racism to build community trust. To begin this investigation, a review of scholarly and professional literature was conducted. The goal of this literature review was to understand the role of museums in society, the responsibility of those museums to effectively educate the public on topics of race and identity, and the history of curatorial practice and exhibition production. A search of online databases was conducted, resulting in a collection of scholarly articles from prominent journals in the museum field, and books consisting of collections of essays published by various universities.

Through the review of this literature, three main themes and multiple subthemes emerged. The overall subject of this project is race and identity in museum exhibitions. The first theme that emerged was (1) exhibiting different cultures and social issues, with the subthemes of (a) critical race theory, (b) curating cultural topics, and (c) social issues in museums. The second theme that emerged was (2) modern curatorial practice, with the subthemes of (a) defining a curator, (b) the history and evolution of curating, and (c) producing an exhibition. The third theme was (3) the museum as a public institution, with the subthemes of (a) a brief history on the museum and the public, and (b) museums and relevancy.

The statement of the problem in Chapter 1 and the review of the literature in Chapter 2 does not demonstrate a significant gap in the literature regarding this topic. However, it does suggest the relevancy of this topic because of the recent resurgence of social justice in America. The research question for this study was cultivated from the research regarding the problem and the literature:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

The following chapter presents the review of the literature that was utilized to develop this question.

Exhibiting Different Cultures and Social Issues

The first theme that emerged from the literature established the various ways in which galleries and museums can effectively exhibit different cultures and social issues, as well as reasons why museums should be taking actions to exhibit these topics. The subthemes were (a) critical race theory, (b) curating culture topics, and (c) social issues in museums.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) states that racial bias is evident within most actions because of societal constructs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic wrote *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* in 2001 and have since updated it to include events such as Barack Obama's presidency, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the rapidly growing rate of racist hate language in the internet sphere. *Critical Race Theory* suggests that systemic racism is still evident in society because of the foundational aspects of civilization. White people are afforded privilege to live a better life, without as much rejection, fear, and hate as a person of color. This

theory claims that this is because of an *implicit bias* that is indoctrinated into everyone from

when they are born through outlets such as the media and the education system with its

revisionist history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Dovidio et al. (2010), implicit bias

presents a lack of overt awareness in discriminating actions. Moreover, this theory asserts that

because of this indoctrination, it is nearly impossible to not be racist, unless one actively works

to understand the theories and to dismantle their inner bias.

Crenshaw et al. (1995) explained that the foundation of this theory stems from the

systemic racism that took root from slavery. The idea that people of color are lesser beings was

the basis of the conceptualization of slavery in America. White people assumed that any persons

who were not of European descent were not as civilized, and therefore were not complete human

beings, which is how they came to be considered property (Crenshaw et al., 1995). This is also

the reason that people of color were considered disposable. Over time, anyone who was not of

European descent was considered subordinate, and all Black people were considered slaves. A

clear distinction between white people and everyone else was apparent—being white was

equated to freedom, being a person of color equated to captivity and servitude. Even further, to

be white represented value in society. CRT asserts that this binary between races was evident for

so long that subconsciously people still hold the same associations, which is how systemic

racism still exists in most societal institutions (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Through CRT, understanding the underlying causes of systemic racism can reveal its

evidence in the education system and other cultural spheres (Willis, 2017). In the education field,

systemic racism can manifest as rhetoric that is *colorblind* or insensitive towards non-white

struggles. According to Rudnick (2012), being colorblind implies a lack of awareness of racism

and its affects in society. Colorblind-ness can cause the topic of race and identity to become

taboo within classrooms, which can leave discrimination unchecked (Rudnick, 2012). Educators may inadvertently discriminate against students based on race, because many curricula cater to primarily white norms (Rogers & Wetzel, 2015; Rudnick, 2012). CRT is also evident in the education system through the historical lack of access to academia for non-white people that is still evident today (Taylor et al., 2016). Taylor et al. (2016) stated that unequal access is directly related to resources needed to attend institutions of higher education—historically and contemporarily, it is easier for white people to attend college than their Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) counterparts because they are more financially stable. This unequal access in academia contributes to the bias that the BIPOC community is less intelligent than the white community.

As reported by Adams (2017), the same bias that is evident in the educational field is also apparent in museums, and CRT can be a guide to assess and dismantle the bias. Adams (2017) listed four different tenets for museums to consider when using CRT to confront systemic racism: cultivate programs that actively decries racism, rather than just displaying its effects, diversify narratives without overtly catering to white audiences, stop telling stories through the oppressor's perspective, and display the opinions and voices of BIPOC artists.

Curating Cultural Topics

Curating cultural topics became largely popularized through the *biennial*, which is a large group exhibition that occurs internationally every two to five years (O'Neill, 2016). Biennial artworks are largely based on their specific location, reflecting the culture of that location, and biennial curators are expected to display these works in a representative manner for country and its art world (p. 53). For example, Galimberti et al. (2020) claimed that the representation of contemporary Chinese art at the Venice Biennial greatly increased its global network and impact

through exposure. From these widely commercialized and successful exhibitions, curators around the world have realized that educating and exhibiting outside the sphere of their own culture is a powerful technique (O'Neill, 2016). However, ethical issues are evident when exhibiting ideas and objects from other cultures; customs that must be observed and respected, making it crucial for a curator to research cultures outside their own culture (Martinon, 2020). Some of the issues in exhibiting cultural topics stem from religious material, human remains, sensitive material regarding violence in a country (i.e. The Holocaust), and unprovenanced objects (Gazi, 2014). Archambault (2011) stated that one of the main ethical concerns in American museums are the various Native American objects with inaccurate interpretation attached to them. To address many of these concerns, museums need to clarify their exhibition language, tone, inaccurate reconstruction of cultural scenes, and inaccessible design (Gazi, 2014). Because exhibiting sensitive cultural issues can be directly related to ethical concerns, the curator must be transparent with their decisions (O'Neill, 2016), and they must be accountable for every decision made during an exhibition (Blackwood & Purcell, 2014).

As museums produce more culturally relevant exhibitions, they have also become more socially relevant (Sheikh, 2016). Curators are asked to shape the displays to educate people on current events, rather than just moments in history (Ostrander, 2016). Some exhibitions connect the current events represented in contemporary art with objects from the past, such as a contemporary sculpture juxtaposed with an object from an ancient civilization (Eilat, 2016). Eilat (2016) claimed that the nature of art is to be revolutionary—it can facilitate a different understanding of reality in society. With museums actively exhibiting topics of social issues, certain curators can now be considered activists (Reilly & Lippard, 2018). *Curatorial activism* is a new concept, defined by Reilly and Lippard as the curator's willingness to "level hierarchies,

challenge assumptions, counter erasure, promote the margins over the center, [promote the] minority over the majority, inspire intelligent debate, disseminate new knowledge, and encourage strategies of resistance" (p. 22). As noted by Reilly and Lippard (2018), the art historical canon is often criticized for being racist, thus an activist curator will strive to exhibit objects outside of the norm of this canon.

Lippard (2018) also claimed that a curatorial activist combats the general laziness that has the potential to plague a modern institution. According to Lippard (2018), this "laziness" is a reluctance to curate out of one's comfort zone to the point which one might be unconsciously misogynistic, racist, or homophobic (p. 10). Whitely (2012) stated that some of the largest and most progressive institutions can be prone to this phenomenon, especially if they are self-proclaimed modern or contemporary institutions. Whitely (2012) also noted that some curators at these large institutions fail to thoroughly research and present topics of social issues and identity, which then leads to an institutional negligence in accurately and diligently educating the public. O'Neill's (2019) collection of essays emphasizes the idea of *globalization*, in which organizations begin to develop international influence. Prashad (2019) noted the significant separation between those who live privileged lives in the United States without war and turmoil, and those who live in a constant state of fear, which causes a global divide within most countries. Curatorial activism is necessary to assist in dissolving this division through the educational resources that institutions provide about various facets of international issues (Reilly & Lippard, 2018).

Social Issues in Museums

Janes and Sandell (2019) stated that for museums to ensure a good relationship with the public, especially if they are planning on exhibiting sensitive issues, they must acknowledge that

they have been ignorant or inaccurate about race or identity in the past. Wajid and Minott (2019) discussed the network of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic museum workers in the United Kingdom called Museum Detox, which urges institutions to be accountable and to decolonize their ideologies. Museum Detox provides solidarity for people of color who have been victims of systemic racism at museums, while also holding museums accountable for their racist actions and lack of diversity. It also suggests that institutions are hypocritical to expect the public to trust the contents of exhibitions involving social issues when they are simultaneously displaying colonial beliefs and forms of *microaggressions*. A microaggression is an indirect or subtle action that perpetuates stereotypes towards the BIPOC community (Yearwood, 2017). Microaggressions are a part of systemic racism, which means that they are embedded in many cultural institutions such as museums (Aleman, 2009).

Decolonizing a museum involves accountability, complex restructuring, designated space, time, and money (Wajid & Minott, 2019). Lynch (2017) also discussed accountability and asserted that continuing to produce exhibitions about social issues from the past while ignoring current social issues will cause the institution to become irrelevant. In addition, Lynch (2017) stated that everyone in the museum must be aligned with the same institutional values if they are to educate the public with integrity. Miscommunications and disagreements between the staff and the board will be reflected in the exhibitions. Museums can and should circulate dialogue on multiple contemporary issues to promote social cohesion, but the institutions must first affirm that they are accepting of the identities of their diverse audiences (Gardner, 2019). This fact may force museums to assess if and when they were ignorant in the past, and restructure their foundations, mission statements, and goals based on this assessment (Rosenberg, 2011).

Exhibitions about social issues should be accessible to most, if not all demographics (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008). This suggests that people across all races, backgrounds, abilities, and social classes should feel comfortable visiting a museum exhibition. In *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience,* Falk (2009) highlighted the personalized aspect of a museum visit. A museum visitor brings with them prior knowledge and personal interests, which are significant aspects of their identity. This identity draws people to certain exhibitions or displays, but dispels them from others, which Falk labeled as identity-related motivators. *Identity-related motivators* are the label given to topics that visitors can directly relate to because of their background and personal history, which motivates them to further explore the subject (Falk, 2009). These motivators can distinguish a satisfactory museum visit. If a person connects to a museum exhibition because of an identity-related motivator, then their visit is more likely to be successful.

Garoian (2001) stated that *museum pedagogy*, which is the practice of teaching through museum programming, has evolved into a *performance*. This suggests that the objects should be in dialogue with each other and with the visitor, immersing the visitor into the narrative of the exhibition (Garoian, 2001). Hooper-Greenhill (2008) noted that in the past, curators would assign meaning to objects, which would inform the museum's educational programs. Now, curators organize objects to facilitate *audience meaning-making*, which relates back to Garoian's (2001) object performance theory regarding museum pedagogy. Audience meaning-making is the theory that visitors bring their own personal history to a museum, so they assign their own meaning to objects based on their own identity, similar to identity-related motivators (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008). This development in museum pedagogy promotes exhibition accessibility by inviting various demographics to learn at their own individual educational pace. Another way to

access multiple groups of people is consistently update exhibitions and the related information (Wajid & Minott, 2019). For example, historical issues should be presented in a contemporary perspective, and any new information should be included in existing exhibitions (Wajid & Minott, 2019). Social issues are constantly changing, so the information presented in museums should be current and include recent developments for the most impact and relevancy (Lynch, 2017).

Modern Curatorial Practice

The second theme that emerged from the literature explained the different roles of the curator which culminates in the overall exhibition production process. The subthemes were (a) defining a curator, (b) the history and evolution of curating, and (c) producing an exhibition.

Defining a Curator

The term curator comes from *curare*, which translates as *to take care of* (George, 2017). Curators are responsible for caring for a collection of physical works or ideological concepts and organizing them to benefit specific groups of people (Vesic & Jeric, 2016). Although the role of the curator has evolved over time, the title and formal definition of a curator has overall remained the same. Since the beginning of the profession in the early 1800s, curators have crafted their knowledge into different creative endeavors; they are designers of educational opportunity and insight (Smith, 2012), meaning that through these endeavors at various museums and galleries, the educational mission of these spaces is expressed. Museum or institutional curators often have a separate field of study (history, geography, English, foreign language/culture), which they can then apply to the organization of institution's collections and further programming (AAM Curators Committee, 2018).

Scott and Fischer (2011) stated that a modern curator is considered a "Frankenstein," (p. 9) which is defined as a combination of many professions. Medina (2011) explained this terminology further when describing a curator in contemporary practice. In the past, the curator might have been completely sequestered to taking care of physical objects, but now the curator has adopted the qualities of a *liaison*. The liaison qualities mean that curators research or physically speak to the artists and the humans connected to the objects to facilitate an authentic understanding in the visitor (Medina, 2011). Curators must be willing to take risks and to adapt to each exhibition in a case-by-case basis—no two exhibitions will be the same, so the curatorial process must be adjusted appropriately (Manacorda, 2011). Gillick (2016) used the term "complete curator" for someone will alter their mindset and methods based on the needs of the exhibition, the institution, and the artists (p. 71). The "complete curator" is similar to the "Frankenstein" analogy from Scott & Fisher (2011) in that they both describe the curator as incorporating many different roles within their profession (Gillick, 2016).

Eilat (2016) suggested that a modern curator is also *worldly*. This implies that if a curator is responsible for an exhibition about a specific culture, they must immerse themselves in that culture, even if it means visiting a separate country to understand the customs. Along with immersing themselves in other cultures, curators should be able to adequately convey what they learn from these cultures to their own communities (Sheikh, 2016). Obrist (2011) discussed the tactic of "bridging the gap," (p. 117) or inviting in experts where the curator's experience or knowledge lacks. A curator who values exhibiting with complete accuracy and authenticity will remain committed to expanding their education to other spheres, and to admitting if there if they have a hole in their knowledge. Obrist (2011) recommended that curators search for architects, engineers, archivists, scholars, and other professionals to recruit as teachers for specific projects.

In this regard, the act of co-curating has become more popular in recent years because of the benefits of combining multiple sources of scholarship (Obrist & Raza, 2014).

The History and Evolution of Curating

The curatorial process began as a rigid and elite formula, designed specifically for the upper class, educated population (Schubert, 2016). Schubert (2016) described the roots of curating, which came to light with the founding of the first museum institutions: The British Museum and the Musée du Louvre. According to Schubert (2016), "the museum was the domain of learned gentlemen and access was quite restricted" (p. 17). When Napoleon's administration took over the Louvre in 1801, Napoleon appointed Dominique Vivant Denon as the first director, and also changed the Louvre's name to the Musée Napoleon. Denon organized Napoleon's conquests, which was noted as one of the first forms of institutional curation. Denon stated: "The first time you walk through this gallery, you will find that this [new hang] brings a character of order, instruction, and classification" (p. 20). Denon's institutional object organization was revolutionary in museum education, as it provided context for people who were not previously informed on the story of the objects, and facilitated audience discovery (Schubert, 2016).

The museum field in Berlin was slower in revolutionizing than England and France yet produced a curator that can be comparable to a modern curator. Schubert (2016) describes Wilhelm Bode as an expert in many artistic subjects such as Dutch and Flemish paintings, Italian Renaissance art, and decorative arts. In France, Denon had no expertise in grouping the works, so Bode's scholarship was considered a progression in the curatorial field. Bode also encompassed many liaison qualities, as he was skilled in tending to private collectors and donors, establishing trust that their works were in good hands at his institution. Although Schubert

(2016) details many more developments in the institutional and curatorial fields, many of them emulate the styles of curators such as Denon and Bode.

Many curatorial study programs base their educational frameworks on the achievements of historically renown curators such as Denon and Bode (Hoffman, 2013). In Hoffman's (2013) compilation of essays, Pedrosa (2013) voiced his skepticism of curatorial study programs, claiming that most of these programs produce a formulaic curator. According to Pedrosa (2013), although curatorial frameworks based on celebrated curators are not negative, they sometimes can result in curators that are dispassionate and opposed to risks. The training of a contemporary curator comes through practical endeavors such as internships and curatorial assistantships, in which potential curators can explore and communicate different theories of the specified exhibition topic (Pedrosa, 2013). Balzer (2015) also claimed that the curatorial career has evolved into a project manager position, because the field now requires skills such as financial literacy, archival skills, and conservation abilities. Fowl (2010) stated that curating is a modern industry, with multiple branches of expertise necessary in designing an exhibition free of complications.

The modern museum is moving away from a formulaic way of exhibiting, and therefore, curating (Pedrosa, 2013). One of the contemporary curatorial methods is direct collaboration with the artist's process in creating exhibition content (Ventislavov, 2014). Ventislavov (2014) utilized the 2010 Marina Abramovic career retrospective as an example of this assertion. In a subsequent documentary about the retrospective, it was revealed that the seminal performance art piece was proposed by the curator, Klaus Biesenbach. This portrayed an entire new ideal of curatorship, in which the curator is involved with the conception of the art for the exhibition (Ventislavov, 2014). Clifford (2015) asserted that the European model and system of curating is

dead, and that curating has reached a new era. He stated that if institutions do not accept this new

practice, they will inevitably fail. In the following section, the exhibition production process with

be discussed in relation to the modern curator.

Producing an Exhibition

The exhibition production process is synonymous to the modern curatorial practice in that

many of the traditional aspects of exhibition production are now a part of curatorial duties

(Medina, 2011). The curator is responsible for developing an exhibition proposal or outline,

which states the various aspects of the exhibition production process (George, 2017). The

proposal/outline incorporates approximately 23 components. These components include the

name/s of the curator or curators, date of the document, the venue, rationale for the venue, dates

for the exhibition and rationale, exhibition scale, mediums of the object, design concept (linear,

narrative, solo, retrospective, travelling, or thematic), and narrative for the exhibition theme and

works. Outlines can also include the target audience, publications, marketing and public relations

efforts, exhibition checklist, artist biographies, biographies of the exhibition team, potential

lenders, budget for the exhibition, projected programming, exhibition timeline, and a proposed

floorplan (George, 2017).

Producing an exhibition is a process which involves the entire museum staff. After the

main curator submits the proposal/outline, other staff execute the loan agreements, facilitate the

acquisition of the objects and the subsequent curatorial arrangement, and manage the

organization of the duties of the other staff members (McLean, 1999). The exhibition design and

construction team execute the stated floorplan, the education department cultivates programs

based on the themes of the exhibitions, and the marketing department produces press materials.

Traditionally, this was a chronological process, but the process has shifted to be increasingly

collaborative across departments for cohesiveness. In modern museums, every aspect of exhibition production is now a cooperation between departments such as curatorial, education, design, and marketing.

Exhibitions are traditionally a combination of "images, objects, and architecture" (McLean, 1999, p.100). As such, the conjunction of multiple fields within exhibitions is also beneficial to the institution because multiple layers of education are communicated to the visitors (Chung, 2009; McLean, 1999). Both Chung (2009) and McLean (1999) noted that producing interdisciplinary exhibitions prompts knowledge in both the museum staff and the visitor, as the visitor might not expect to learn about science at an art museum.

Obrist (2001) stated that the purpose of exhibition installations is to explore the vast number of interactions between objects and ideas—there are no limitations to the definition of an *object*. Obrist (2001) offered the example of the curator and art historian Hubert Damisch. Damisch was interested in expelling the notion of categories within museums and exhibitions, instead promoting transversiality (Obrist, 2001). *Transversiality* is the opposite of linear, meaning that Damisch accentuated randomness and unpredictability within a museum. In an exhibition, this would translate as a solemn, quiet space juxtaposed with a loud and colorful space. A predetermined route for the exhibition is not blatantly stated, and the visitor decides the order of their personal exhibition experience, which cultivates a more personal experience.

Exhibition design is a major component of producing an exhibition. Klobe (2012) emphasized that museum objects require a precise organization to properly communicate a story to the visitors. To ensure this organization, the *exhibition concept* should be fully understood by the entire team. The concept of the exhibition should be reflected through the entirety of the exhibition, which is all encompassing of the selected museum objects and the surrounding

environment. The surrounding environment includes wall shape, size of galleries, color of walls, color of wall text, wall text font, lighting, space between works, text cards, and display cases (Klobe, 2012). McKenna-Cress and Kamien (2013) also stated a similar notion of cohesiveness between *concept*, *museum objects,* and *surrounding environment*. The exhibition production process should incorporate specific visitor goals which is reflected in this design. Those goals should articulate what the visitor might feel (e.g. happiness, nostalgia, pride, fear, shame), and what specific outcomes the exhibition would promote (e.g. developing a new skill, learning new information, facilitating an experience). Exhibition production incorporates the multiple facets of the process such as curation, design, construction, and promotion.

The Museum as a Public Institution

The third theme that emerged from the literature described the importance of the connection between museums and their communities. The subthemes were (a) a brief history on museums and the public, and (b) museums and relevancy.

A Brief History on Museums and the Public

In recent years, museums have been boosting the education of various topics (Dierking & Falk, 2011). However, the museum field has struggled with accessibility for many years. In his seminal article, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum," Cameron (1971) emphasized that, at the time when it was written, museums were known as being places for quiet contemplation, and for gatherings of academics. Because of this general consensus that museums were for the educated, many groups were deterred from visiting.

Historically, museums were research centers for elite members of society, who would also visit museums to socialize with other members of their educated groups (Cameron, 1971). This was a prominent aspect of the European museum model, which spread to multiple countries

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(Simmons, 2016). The European model was conceived from royal collections, which were converted into government property, then displayed as representation of the country. In other countries, this pattern was largely followed, but the objects came from private collections in which the owners would acquire works then donate them.

A major difference in American museums is that they were mostly privately owned and funded, rather than government funded (Simmons, 2016). Privately endowed museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, were filled with bequests and gifts from wealthy donors like John D. Rockefeller. Although the stated focus of the American museum was on education, museums were not known for providing educational context with the displayed objects, which was common in the European museum model (Schubert, 2016).

Despite the fact that American museums were largely following the European museum model (Simmons, 2016), some museums were moving away from this standard. The Newark Museum, established by John Cotton Dana in 1909, is considered revolutionary in this regard (Kern, 2016). Dana decided that his museum, which was then housed at the Newark Public Library, would promote engagement and pedagogy at all class levels. The objects in Dana's exhibitions were accompanied by educational context, and also had program counterparts, which encouraged audience participation. The Newark Museum was also novel in that when it exhibited artist Childe Hassam in 1911 and artist Max Weber in 1913, it was the first museum in the United States to exhibit living artists, rather than artists that were deceased (Kern, 2016).

At the time, the Newark Museum was an anomaly in its ideology and exhibition techniques (Kern, 2016). Other museums only started becoming more accessible intellectually to various audiences with the inception of the museum as a democratic institution, which occurred in the 1950s (Schubert, 2016). This ideology emerged through the observation of science and

industrial museums such as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., because the objects and the purpose were different than those of an art museum. These types of objects, such as specimens and machine parts, required in depth explanations displayed as a part of the exhibition (Levin, 2002). Visitors were not able to understand these objects based on observation alone because of their complex nature—they required prompting and education to facilitate a connection (Levin, 2002). The science and industrial museums were also providing opportunities for audience participation, with subsequent programing to their exhibitions, which allowed people to start visiting museums as social outings (Simmons, 2016). Although many museum staff members felt as though this undervalued the integrity of the institutions, many museum directors felt as though this was a way to bring it larger audiences (Levin, 2002). By 1960, 79% of museums had educational programming connected to their exhibited objects (Simmons, 2016), and by 1962, museum attendance in the United States doubled.

With this expansion of museums into various parts of society outside of academia, the field grappled with its identity for many years. In 1984, the American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums, AAM) released *Museums for a New Century: A Report on the Commission for the Museums for a New Century*, which was a collection of research findings on the museum field by a large group of museum professionals, executed from 1982 to 1984 (Weller, 1985). These findings offered various conclusions, including that museums must evolve into a more professional field, with standardized frameworks for existence and function, which would bring the industry more national attention, and therefore resources; and also that a larger amount of resources need to be allotted towards educational programs in museums.

As a result of this report, the AAM created a task force for museum education in 1989 (AAM, 1992). The purpose of this group was to establish museum education as a legitimate profession in the museum field, instead of a program-centered counterpart to museum exhibitions. In 1992, AAM released a report titled *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, which details the complex role of museum education and how modern museums can implement museum education principles in practice (Hirzy, 1992). The report emphasized that museums need to integrate education into their foundations, and they can start by including the role of education in their mission statements. It also stated that in order to carry out this mission to educate the public, museums must widen their sphere of influence, and ensure that their visitor domain is diversified, which could be possible through networking with various organizations and communities. It stated that in order to carry out these goals with integrity, museums must also focus on professional development to ensure that employees are adept to diverse audiences, and a reassessment of budgeting so that educational and public marketing efforts are at the forefront. This report was reissued in 2008 by the AAM.

Museums and Relevancy

Museums must work to stay relevant to the community they serve, so that the continued efforts in education are noticed and absorbed (Simon, 2016). Simon (2016) stated that *relevance* is a combination of familiarity, newness, and audience participation. Relevance can also be measured through the new responsibilities of museum professionals, which includes new technologies, relevant social media, increased networking, and the evolving supportive measures for visitors (Nielsen, 2015). Museums must present information and exhibitions in a manner that engages the audience that already frequents the institution, but also in a manner which draws in new audiences (Simon, 2016). They must be adaptable and balanced, remaining both historically

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and contemporarily relevant (Nielsen, 2015). In this way, familiarity is cultivated in both old and new audiences, as a new audience might connect with the exhibition theme, but old audiences connect historically with the institution and its values (Simon, 2016). This method allows for the institution to widen their sphere of influence and to bridge socioeconomic and cultural divides. Although most museums have conservative foundational aspects, due to the European museum model which most are emulated from (Simmons, 2016), they should strive to be an expression of what is important in the culture, or what the people value (Bishop & Perjovschi, 2014).

While museums are consistently generating new exhibitions, they are also a "cultural artifact," in that they have the potential to display the institution's "visions, biases, and concerns" (Heumann Gurian, 2006, p. 151). These phrases suggest that museums can become removed from contemporary issues within their communities if they are not vigilant in their engagement and community efforts (Stanish, 2008). Consistently displaying various learning approaches in an exhibition is one method to create widespread engagement within the community (Heumann Gurian, 2006). Heumann Gurian (2006) stated that different approaches to learning include visual, sound, and guided, all which are possible in a museum setting. Relevancy within the museum field is also important—sharing resources with other institutions inhibits the spread of scholarship and different tactics of exhibiting various topics and objects (Vitali, 2016). The AAM encouraged networking with other museums and organizations to diversify the audience, as well as the information that the museum presents (American Alliance of Museums, 1992).

The community must trust the information that they get from an exhibition (De Montebello et al., 2004). One "inaccurate, tone deaf, or poorly done" exhibition can cause avid museum-goers to lose interest and general trust in an institution (p. 152). Dierking and Falk (2011) stated that museums are becoming more popular with the public because many people are

looking for entertainment and recreation outside of their own quotidian activities. The United States is evolving into what Dierking and Falk (2018) called a *learning society*, meaning that intellectual strengths in various subjects is becoming popular. Museums are becoming popular for weekend activities because of this change in societal values. Along with the *learning society* theory, research shows that the public does not doubt the information in museums, nor do they feel they have to research it further (De Montebello et al., 2004). Marincola (2015) stated that a stable and community-focused institution will utilize the public trust as a motivator to continuously exhibit works with integrity.

Dierking and Falk (2011) also noted the concept of long-term learning at museums. This notion is based on the *Interactive Experience Model* framework, which combines *personal context*, *physical context*, and *social context* to create an interactive experience. Personal context is the individual experiences and knowledge that a visitor brings with them to the museum, physical context is the architecture and design of the museum and exhibition, and social context is the difference in behavior from a solo visitor to a group visit (Dierking and Falk, 2011). According to Dierking and Falk (2011), this type of learning is effective in museums because it incorporates the unknown factors (social context and personal context) which can cause two visitors to have very different experiences when viewing the same object. This framework can aid in long-term learning because it embraces the open-ended nature of the museum experience. Dierking and Falk's research suggests that the quality of a museum visit, and therefore the visitor's trust, increases as the museum adapts to the diverse learning styles of its public.

In other efforts to increase relevancy, some museums are incorporating virtual exhibitions and other forms of technology into their programs (Winesmith & Anderson, 2020). In the past 25 years, technology has become widely accessible to the general public, as well as educational

institutions, and museums have had to rapidly adapt to the change. Science museums were the

first to address this development—many have implemented technologies such as planetariums,

mechanical and robotic demonstrations, digital maps, touch-screen labels, accessible science

labs, virtual reality simulations, simulated role-play, and many other smaller enhancements to

lighting and display methods (Franks et al., 2016). Other types of museums, such as art

museums, lack the same breadth of funding and grants as science museums, therefore were

behind in equipping their halls with similar machinery (Camarero et al., 2011). For example,

Camarero et al. (2011) noted that for most art museums, innovations are defined as changes in

service, such as digital catalogues or virtual museum explorations, whereas, science museums

have more technologically advanced innovations. However, the larger and more well-known art

museums that have a larger pool of resources are able to implement technology such as

headphone guided tours, I-pads, virtual-reality enhanced exhibitions, and various advanced

lighting systems, along with updated websites with pages dedicated to displaying various

galleries and collections (Franks et al., 2016).

Along with these additions to the infrastructure of art museums, new media is constantly

presented in contemporary art works (Graham & Cook, 2015). Many of these works contain

themes of various social issues, so many institutions are updating their galleries in order to house

these works, which would facilitate more socially relevant programming. Museums with the

increased funding to add these forms of technology are able stay relevant and to add other layers

of accessibility (Camarero et al., 2011). Virtual exhibitions are another form of museum

technology, which many museums strive to include in their programs to widen their sphere of

influence and bring in more engagement (Blume, 2017). According to Blume (2017), the first

form of a virtual exhibition came in the form of a CD-ROM in 1997, its sole purpose to spread

the exhibition to groups of people that could not come to the physical show. This is also the essence of modern virtual exhibitions, in that museums want to increase awareness of the exhibitions they present, and therefore, educate more people on the subjects. This fact is especially relevant through the increasingly virtual world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

The literature in this review revealed the themes of exhibiting different cultural and social issues, the modern curator, and the museum as a public institution. The literature in this review showed that in order to exhibit social issues or cultural issues, museums must be accountable (Lynch, 2017). Lynch (2017) also noted that museums should keep their social issues recent to keep the public's interest. Along with being accountable, museums also need to be diverse and accessible (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008). Because this of the racial themes of this study, it was looked at through the lens of the Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This theory claims that systemic racism is evident in all fields, even institutions such as museums, because of biases that have roots in slavery.

The review of the literature also revealed the origins of the curator (Schubert, 2016), while listing the fundamental characteristics of a modern curator: a liaison (Medina, 2011), adaptable (Gillick, 2016), and worldly (Eilat, 2016). Balzer (2015) also insisted that a curator is similar to a project manager. From the curatorial profession's beginnings, which were political in nature (Schubert, 2016), to the contemporary activist curator (Reilly & Lippard, 2018), the literature showed that the career of curating is fluid in its definition and its history. The literature also showed that exhibition production process duties are synonymous to the roles of the modern curator (Medina, 2011).

The literature for the museum field conveyed a similar conclusion. The museum field began with elitist Eurocentric methods (Schubert, 2016). Because of the contemporary focus on public engagement museums are finding multiple ways to stay relevant in their communities (Simon, 2016). Some authors, such as Dierking and Falk (2011) stated that museums embrace frameworks such as the Interactive Experience Model, which draws on the open-endedness and personal aspects of a learning experience. Other literature showed that museums are attempting to remain relevant, and therefore remain trustworthy to the public (De Montebello et al., 2004) by keeping the exhibitions current with technology (Winesmith & Anderson, 2020).

This literature, and the subsequent study, assist in answering the research question:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

The following chapter explains the multi-case study that was utilized to answer this research. The multi-case study examins two mid-sized art museums to understand their connections to the community and their exhibitions on race and identity.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the themes that emerged from the literature related to the research question were explored and explained. To garner an understanding of exhibitions with topics of race and identity and how they relate to community trust, this research project implemented a qualitative multi-case study on exhibitions at mid-sized art museums with those themes. Data was collected through document analysis related to specific exhibitions at the Montclair Art Museum and the Newark Museum of Art, then analyzed utilizing pattern matching and cross-case synthesis methods. The implementation of this case study served to identify patterns in institutional decisions which could potentially combat systemic racism and build community trust. The research aimed to answer the question:

> **RQ**: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

This chapter explains the chosen method, the rationale for selection of this methodology, the methods for data collection within the case study, and the methods for subsequently analyzing the data in the findings.

Method Description and Rationale

There are multiple methods within the category of qualitative research. Along with *case study*, other methods include *narrative research*, *ethnography*, *phenomenology*, and *grounded theory*. Narrative research and ethnography are similar in that the researcher studies the

experience and personal lives of different people or groups of people, but ethnography is focused on the cultural patterns of the group (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Fetterman, 2008). Phenomenology and grounded theory rely on an assumption or a theory about a population made by the researcher. In phenomenology, a phenomenon is identified and supporting data is collected through a population, while in grounded theory, populations are studied and a theory is presented based on the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Of these methods, case study was selected for this project because of the criteria presented by Norander, Brandhorst (2017) and Creswell and Poth (2018).

The qualitative *case study method* is used to research "real-life phenomenon within specific contexts" (Norander & Brandhorst, 2017). The purpose of this research project was to analyze the institutional process involved in producing exhibitions with topics of race and identity, through specific exhibitions at mid-sized art museums. Norander and Brandhorst's (2017) criteria for a case study is appropriate for this project because the topic of race and identity is a *real-life phenomenon*, which was addressed in Chapter 2 through the Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory suggests that an implicit bias is evident in most cultural institutions because of various societal constructs and indoctrination implemented through revisionist history evident in the education system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Museums are considered to be cultural institutions (Sheikh, 2016), in that they are public or nonprofit establishments which further educational and cultural ideologies. It can be concluded that a museum exhibition is considered a *specific context* because it is an established singular event, within the institutional space, in which the *real-life phenomenon* of race and identity can be explored.

The case study method is defined by a *bounded system*, or systems, in which the subject of the study is "defined or described within certain parameters" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

purpose of utilizing these bounded systems is to explore the research question in the specific context of the highlighted system. In this research project two exhibitions were selected at two mid-sized art museums to represent the cases in the case study. The exhibitions were *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* at the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey; and *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century* at the Newark Museum of Art in Newark, New Jersey. The cases are bound in multiple ways. First, both selected museums are bound physically with walls. The physical aspect of the museum facilitates a heightened relationship between the museum guest and the displayed objects and ideas, which creates a distinct memory of the space (McIntyre, 2009). The respective museums are also bound theoretically with a mission statement and institutional values. The mission statement defines these institutional values through asserting the museum's public service role and stating why the museum exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts (AAM, 2018). Additionally, exhibitions in the museums are bound by timeframe and by physicality of the museum. The timeframe of the exhibition refers to the number of days, weeks or months in which it was displayed to the public, and serves as the organizational structure (Lubar, 2013). Based on these criteria, these bounded cases are appropriate to utilize within a case study method.

After the qualitative method of a case study was identified, the criteria for selecting cases within the study was then addressed. According to Saldaña (2011), and Seawright and Gerrig (2008) cases are chosen *deliberately, strategically,* or *conveniently.* A deliberately chosen case presents a unique situation, in which specific patterns can be studied in the context of the issue in the project's research question. Strategically chosen cases represent situations that are typical for the systems that are being researched. Conveniently chosen cases are chosen based on easy access to the systems and close proximity to the researcher (Saldaña, 2011). Seawright and

Gerrig (2008) noted that deliberately chosen cases could also be called *extreme cases*, because of their unusual variables. The nature of the RQ led to deliberately chosen cases because they portrayed unique situations that could potentially answer the *how* component of the question.

Furthermore, because this project incorporated more than one case, the case study is considered a *collective case study* or a *multiple case study*, meaning that multiple cases are examined through the lens of one case study to examine different aspects of the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Utilizing multiple cases within a case study is effective when the cases themselves are chosen because of exemplary characteristics (Yin, 2017), and although the cases are thematically linked, there are often nuances which set them apart from each other (Gagnon, 2010; Stake, 2006). Specific criteria to rationalize the selection of two different cases was identified: a recent exhibition showing a theme of race and identity, evident efforts by the institution to connect to the targeted demographics within the theme of the exhibition, and varying audiences/communities. The first criterion was chosen because the research question examines themes of race and identity. The second criterion exemplifies that the institution has supportive measures for these themes. The third criterion portrays that each of the institutions have different targeted audiences for their exhibitions, which could affect the process and the result.

The two selected institutions were the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey and the Newark Museum of Art in Newark, New Jersey. The first institution, the Montclair Art Museum, housed the exhibition *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* from September 16th, 2018 to January 6th, 2019. In this exhibition, "Walker explores issues of race, gender, sexuality, and violence in American history and contemporary culture" (Montclair Art Museum, 2018a). The exhibition aligns with the museum's mission which is to "engage their

diverse community" and to "inspire and engage people of all ages in their experience with art, including the rich inter-cultural and global connections throughout American history, and the continuing relevance of art to contemporary life" (Montclair Art Museum, n.d.). The museum also houses an African American Cultural Committee dedicated to ensuring that the institution's audience is expanded into different demographics within the community, which also aligns with the mission.

The second institution, the Newark Museum of Art, currently houses the permanent exhibition, *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*, which includes gallery themes such as "Traversing America," "The Harlem Renaissance," and "Civil Rights and the Art of Identity." The exhibition was recently reinstalled with "an expanded emphasis on interdisciplinary themes and the breadth of the American experience" (Newark Museum of Art, 2016). The museum's mission is to "welcome everyone with inclusive experiences that spark curiosity and foster community" (Newark Museum of Art, 2020a). Related to this mission, the museum started an initiative called *PLACE* (Promoting Legislative and Community Engagement) and provides monetary donations, food donations, and resource links to community members in need due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Newark Museum of Art, 2020b).

Both institutions and their exhibitions fit the first two criteria for the case study, which were exhibitions with themes of race and identity, and community efforts. The third criterion, related to target audiences, was validated through the U.S. Census Bureau (2019). As of July 1, 2019, Montclair, New Jersey presented the following demographics: 65.8% White, 24% Black, 10.4% Latino, 4.4% two or more races, 3.4% Asian, and 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native. Newark, New Jersey presented the following demographics: 26.1% White, 49.7% Black, 36.4% Latino, 2.4% two or more races, 2.1% Asian, and 0.5% American Indian or Alaska

Native. These institutions reflect varied demographics within their communities, which in turn reflects each institution's community-centered mission and values (Montclair Art Museum) (Newark Museum of Art). In a multi-case study, the research presented more diverse evidence because of the different demographics of the two communities in the cases (Stake, 2006).

Data Collection

Some of the most prominent forms of data collection within a case study are *document analysis*, *interviews*, and *setting observation* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gagnon 2010; Norander & Brandhorst, 2017). Document analysis refers to the collection and analysis of specific documents relevant to the bounded system in a case, interviews are a series of questions and answers with a relevant human subject connected to the bounded system, and setting observation is the record of the researcher's physical experience in the bounded system (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Olson, 2010; Yin, 2017). Setting observation and interviews were eliminated as potential data collection methods because of limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and time constraints of the project (Yin, 2017). The document analysis method was selected because the limitations were lessened, and because this method presented a reasonable amount of data to complete the study.

Merriam (2009) and Olson (2010) established five types of data in document analysis research: *public records*, *personal documents*, *visual documents*, *popular culture documents* and *physical material documents*. Public records are an organization's documented activities which are available for retrieval by any member of the public, personal documents are recorded narratives of a person's actions made within a specific context, visual documents include institutional film, photography, and video, popular culture documents refer to materials from any mass communication sources such as newspapers, articles on the internet, entertainment films, literature, or television, and physical material documents are artifacts directly obtained from an

institution. Flick's (2009) guidelines for appropriate document selection were followed, which includes *authenticity*, *credibility*, *representativeness*, and *meaning*. Authenticity and credibility imply that the documents are not forged, and are mined from an unquestionable source, while representativeness and meaning suggest that the documents are comprehensible and important to the research project (Ridder, 2016).

After the two mid-sized art museums were chosen for the collective case study, a three-step process was employed to select the documents to be collected and then filed into the categories presented by Merriam (2009). First, the websites for both museums were accessed to search for relevant public records documents. On each website, the *About* pages, the *History* pages, the *Financial Information* pages, and the *Staff* pages, were collected and organized into a public records file. The *Archives* pages, *Education* pages, and *Programs* pages were also added. The web pages for the exhibition in each case, which included photos of the galleries and exhibition text, were filed into visual documents. The researcher possessed photographs from a previous visit of one of the exhibitions, which were added into the personal documents category.

Next, physical material for both exhibitions was sought out. In this step, a Google search for physical catalogs for either exhibition was implemented. A catalog was found for the Newark Museum of Art case, but not for the Montclair Art Museum case. Both institutions were then contacted to obtain curatorial planning documents from the exhibitions, which consisted of press releases, proposal material, photograph documentation of the galleries, correspondence with the artists, floorplans, and wall text. The documents that were provided by the institutions were filed into the physical material documents category.

Last, a Google search of the exhibitions was conducted. This search was intended to identify any reviews about the exhibitions from outside sources. The search yielded news outlet

reviews from sources such as *Forbes, Hyperallergic, ArtNews,* and *ArtNet*, which were

organized into a popular culture documents file. Along with these sources, reviews from sites

such as *TripAdvisor* and *Yelp* were added to the personal documents file. On *TripAdvisor* and

Yelp, the number of reviews for each institution was recorded, then seven key words were

searched within the reviews: *community*, *free*, *exhibition/exhibit*, *programs*/*activities*, *collection*,

education, and *family*. These key words were chosen because they related to the exhibition

production process.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection, the two data analysis methods of *open coding* and *cross-

case synthesis* were employed. The data was thematically coded utilizing the *open coding*

method. With this method, concepts are identified and recorded for the initial categorization of

the data through line-by-line examination (Khandkar, 2009). In this project, the various

documents were analyzed line by line to reveal codes, which were then compiled into an Excel

spreadsheet. From this spreadsheet, the codes were then distributed throughout coding sheets.

Through layers of examination, the codes further refined relevant themes which revealed the

patterns of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). The themes were

used to organize the coding sheets. The categories in the code sheet were *theme*, *codes definition*,

when to use, and *example of a segment of text from study*. This cyclical process was repeated for

both cases in the case study.

Two different cases were examined in the multi-case study, so cross-case synthesis and

analysis was also used to distinguish similarities and differences among thematic elements of

each case (Leavy, 2014). Chapter 4 was structurally organized so that the two cases would be

constantly compared within the two main themes that emerged from the Findings. Differences in

each case were evident, which could potentially diversify the populations that benefit from the study (Yin, 2017).

Limitations

The limitations that were encountered in this research included researcher bias, organizational access, lack of generalizability, time constraints, and the limited availability of physical material documents. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Norander & Brandhorst, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that generally researchers choose case sites based on a vested interest, which is *internalized bias*. Researcher bias is unavoidable in that choosing one topic, case, or research question is technically biased, but it can be managed with an overall awareness of any subjective values (Ogden, 2008).

In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, research was not able to be conducted onsite at either of the museums in the case study. Because of this, data describing the interior of the institutions or the overall physical experience of the institutions was not included, which could have added a layer of depth to the observations. The interior museum space can be instrumental in shaping the overall experience of a guest (Faulk, 2016), so this is a significant limitation.

The lack of *generalizability* was one of the main limitations in case study research (Batter, 2008), meaning that the findings of the study might not be applicable to a broad set of people or institutions. The sample size for this project was small, so the results might not be generalizable to other museums that lack the resources of the selected institutions, such as funding or staff (Norander & Brandhorst, 2017). Two cases were researched, so only two different communities were represented. Time constraints are related to this limitation, as this

project spanned six months. The small amount of time limited the number of case studies that could have been successfully studied.

In addition, the staff of both institutions was contacted to identify and gain access to pertinent physical material documents. Confidentiality, miscommunication, unavailability, or general lack of cooperation are all reasons that the content could have been limited, as these are associated with human subjects (Van Stee, 2017).

Summary

This chapter identified the qualitative collective case study, which utilizes more than one case to explore an issue within a case study. The methodology supported the investigation of the following question:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

The collective case study utilized one form of data collection, and two different forms of data analysis. Document analysis allowed for the researcher to explore public records, personal documents, visual documents, popular culture documents, and physical materials related to the cases. The subsequent data analysis methods of open coding and cross-case synthesis sought to analyze the overall themes of each case, and then to compare them to each other. The following chapter presents the findings of this case study research. Information gleaned from this case study will then be concisely documented in a series of recommendations for institutions with projected future endeavors involving exhibitions with topics of race and identity.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This project sought to examine mid-sized art museums with exhibition topics of race and identity to assess the institutional support necessary to produce these exhibitions for the community. The guiding research question is:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

In Chapter 2, the existing scholarly and professional literature in the museum field was explored, from which were identified three main themes: (1) exhibiting different cultures and social issues, (2) modern curatorial practice, and (3) the museum as a public institution. In Chapter 3, the methodology to answer this research question was stated and explained. This project utilized a qualitative multi-case study of two mid-sized art museums. The findings of those cases and the overall case study are reported in this chapter.

Data Collection and Analysis

The two cases in this multi-case study were (1) Montclair Art Museum with a focus on the past temporary exhibition, *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works;* and (2) Newark Museum of Art with a focus on the current permanent exhibition, *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*. The criteria for choosing these specific institutions were: (1) an exhibition showing a theme of race and identity, (2) engagement with demographics shown in exhibition (for example, the BIPOC community), and (3) varying demographics of the communities

surrounding the institutions. Various forms of data were collected from each institution for analysis, which included public records documents (museum website pages), personal documents (personal testimonies from museum visits), visual documents (photographs from the exhibitions), popular culture documents (articles from outside sources written about the exhibition and museum), and physical material documents (materials provided by the institution).

The documents were analyzed using the open coding method. Examples of codes from the data include *graphic imagery, display of cultural movements, interactive experience for visitor, partnership with outside organization,* and *emphasizing stereotypes.* These codes were compiled into an excel spreadsheet and primarily grouped by the type of data they were excavated from (public records, personal, visual, popular culture, and physical). The codes were then further organized into categories. For example, codes such as *graphic imagery, racists acts,* and *violent depictions* were condensed into the category of *confrontation*. The categories were then combined to form the themes for both cases.
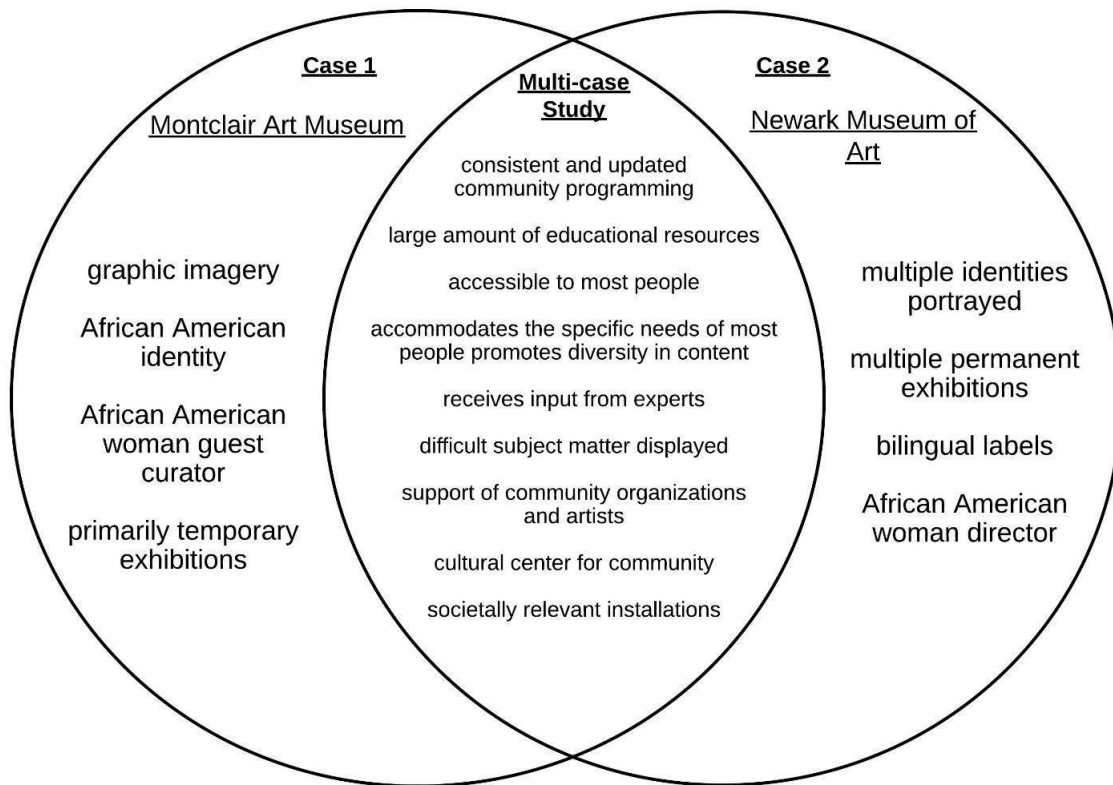
Based on the criteria from which both cases were chosen, the cases were compared to each other on the basis of two main themes: (1) exhibiting topics of race and identity, and (2) community engagement. In the first theme, Montclair Art Museum subtheme was (1) displaying difficult subject matter, and Newark Art Museum subtheme was (1) layers of American identity. In the second theme, the Montclair Art Museum subthemes were (a) empathy for the community and (b) BIPOC and local visibility, and the Newark Museum of Art subthemes were (a) historical relevance and (b) physical and theoretical revitalizations. This structural layout emphasizes the cross-case synthesis data analysis method.

The themes of both cases were similar. However, there are nuanced differences that presented themselves through the coding process. In the diagram below (Figure 1), the overall cases from the case study are presented as well as the differing themes between cases.

Figure 1

Venn Diagram Comparing and Contrasting the Cases

Case 1
Montclair Art Museum

Multi-case Study

Case 2
Newark Museum of Art

consistent and updated community programming

large amount of educational resources

accessible to most people

accommodates the specific needs of most people promotes diversity in content

receives input from experts

difficult subject matter displayed

support of community organizations and artists

cultural center for community

societally relevant installations

graphic imagery

African American identity

African American woman guest curator

primarily temporary exhibitions

multiple identities portrayed

multiple permanent exhibitions

bilingual labels

African American woman director

Note. This figure demonstrates the themes that emerged from the Montclair Art Museum case, the Newark Museum of Art case, and themes that were present in the overall multi-case study.

This chapter documented the report of the data that led to the discovery of these themes within the cases.

Exhibiting Topics of Race and Identity

In the Montclair Art Museum exhibition, *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*, a multitude of graphic imagery was displayed. Kara Walker's work is usually provocative in nature—McKeon (2013) states that Walker's depictions of Black trauma caused her to be notoriously controversial. The imagery warranted content warnings and advisories at the entrances of the exhibition, which was the first time that the institution displayed signs of this nature. Many of the visitors noted that they were impressed by the Montclair Art Museum's display of these works, calling them *brave* in the written visitor comments. The Newark Museum of Art differs in that its exhibition, *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century* is not as graphic as the Kara Walker exhibition. Although both exhibitions presented topics of race and identity, the Montclair Art Museum depicted the violence of racism in African American history, whereas the Newark Museum of Art showed other aspects of various cultural identities outside of violence.

The two museums displayed different experiences of race in America. At the Montclair Art Museum, Kara Walker's works were on the Black experience in America. At the Newark Museum of Art, *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century* incorporates different cultural perspectives through the various subthemes in the exhibition. *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* was a solo exhibition, whereas *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century* includes a large number of artists spanning different time periods.

Montclair Art Museum

The focus of the Montclair Art Museum case was the exhibition, *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*, a temporary exhibition which ran from September 15, 2018 to January 6, 2019. The museum stated in their exhibition description that Kara Walker, as a known

contemporary artist, aims to provoke conversation surrounding "race, gender, sexuality and violence in American history and contemporary culture" (Montclair Art Museum, 2018a).

Displaying Difficult Subject Matter. The entrance of the exhibition, *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* presented wall text introducing the artist and a video of the artist discussing her work. The main entrance and an entrance on the opposite wall of the gallery displayed *content warning* signs (Figure 2). These content warnings were displayed because of the graphic imagery in the works.

Figure 2

*Content Warning Text Outside of the Gallery Entrances*

EXHIBITION ADVISORY FOR VIRGINIA'S LYNCH MOB AND OTHER WORKS: Kara Walker's art, in particular her appropriation and reinterpretation of imagery depicting racial stereotypes, has ignited powerful debates throughout her career. The images, idea and issues in this exhibition may be disturbing to viewers, regardless of one's age, race, or gender. Parental discretion is encouraged.

The chart below (Figure 3) shows the number of works within each category of graphic imagery. 24 works were in the exhibition. Of that total, six works displayed phallic imagery (25%), nine works displayed male or female nudity (37.5%), six works displayed sexual acts (25%), four works displayed violence with a rope (16.67%), five works displayed use of weapons by subjects (20.8%), five works displayed child abuse (20.8%), one work displayed severed limbs (4.2%), six works displayed overt images of racism or discrimination (25%) and 22 works showed symbolic images of systemic racism or discrimination (91.67%).

One of the works was a film called "Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*"* which was sectioned off into a separate room. An additional content warning was shown at the entrance to the film (Figure 4). The content of the film contains all nine categories of graphic imagery that are listed below.

Figure 3

Bar Graph Listing the Graphic Imagery Displayed in Kara Walker's Works
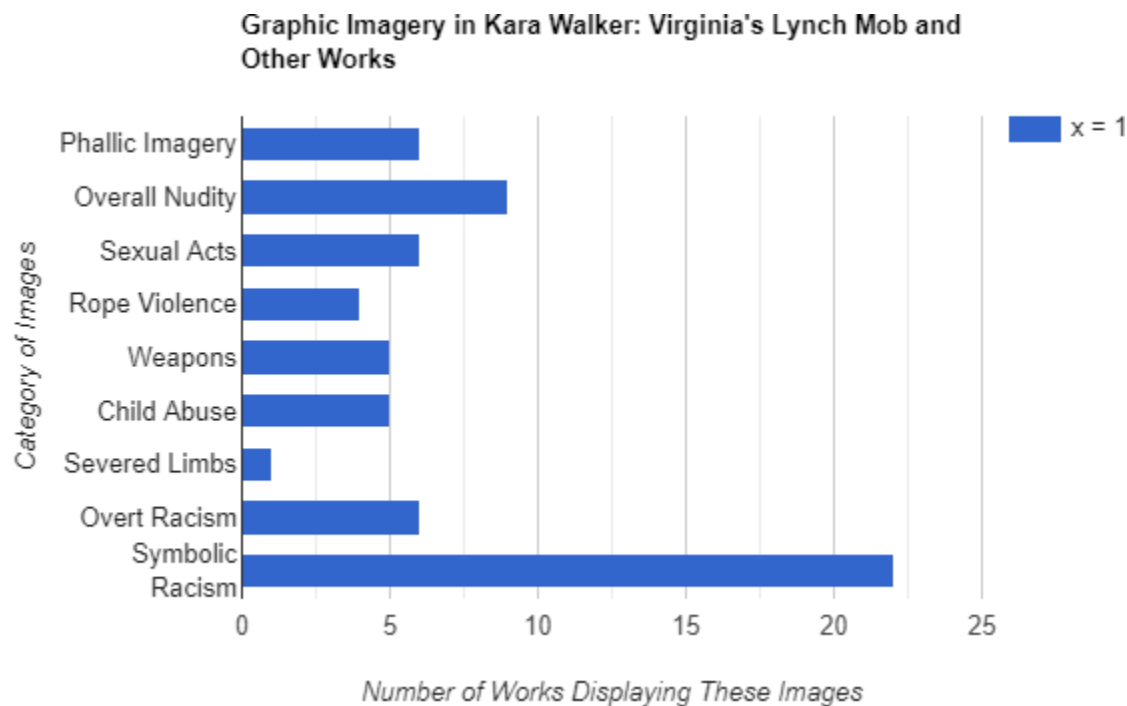
Figure 4

Content Warning for the Video in the Exhibition

"Warning: This film contains explicit sexual violence, which although abstracted, may not be suitable for children under age 18 or sensitive viewers."

Many of the articles written about the exhibition mentioned the difficult subject matter that was presented through Walker's graphic imagery. Micchelli (2018) and Press (2018) emphasized the importance of the artistic style in the show, because Walker works in a distinct medium with detailed black silhouettes made from paper. The silhouettes have no frontal detail or color, but Walker still showcases the complexities of the subject matter through profile portraits. Most of the works are juxtapositions of black and white, and the only color is evident in two watercolors that were created in 1997 (red and brown).

Along with the imagery in the exhibition, the titles of the works were also graphic. Many of the titles portrayed historical references to slavery and racism in the Antebellum South, which is where Walker drew much of the inspiration for the imagery in her works. For example, the centerpiece work was titled "Virginia's Lynch Mob," which referred to a common racially charged practice throughout American history, especially in Southern states. Throughout the titles words and phrases such as *cotton, loyalists, Confederates, army, battle, freedom, race riots,* and *emancipation* were used, emphasizing the violent inspirations for the works. Most prominently, Walker used the term *negress* in many of the works' titles, which shows the artist's reclamation of a historic racial slur.

The museum staff provided 49 visitor comments from 2018 and 2019 for this research project. Out of those 49 comments, 39 (79.5%) stated that they visited *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*. From those 39 comments, 14 comments (35.9%) stated specifically that the exhibition was impactful to them. Words and phrases such as *moving, thought-provoking, powerful, pain, provocative, diverse, evocative, edgy, uncomfortable,* and *historical significance* were used by visitors throughout the comments. of the 39 comments, 36 (92.3%) state that they would recommend the Kara Walker exhibition to friends. Three outlier

visitors (7.7%) did not check either box (yes or no) when asked if they would recommend the exhibition to friends.

This theme of difficult subject matter in the data of the Montclair Art Museum suggests the museum's efforts in facilitating understanding of America's history regarding slavery and racism. A review of the exhibition in *Forbes* magazine noted that Montclair, New Jersey in particular has a history of slavery, which adds to the relevancy of the exhibition at this particular museum (Press, 2018).

Newark Museum of Art

The focus of the Newark Museum of Art case was the exhibition, *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century,* a permanent exhibition which began in 2016 at the start of the museum's ongoing renovations. The 2016 reorganization and reinterpretation of the institution's Native American objects marked the beginning of an extended effort of physical enhancements, which will be further explored in the next theme. The *Native Artists of North American* display was the first sector of the *Seeing America* exhibition, which was an expanded endeavor to reimagine the American art collection at the Newark Museum of Art. *Seeing America* is a long-term installation which spans 290 years, from the 1730s to the present. The entire exhibition, which includes over 300 works from the museum's permanent collection, is divided into two main sections: *1730 to 1900*, and *1900 to present*. The second highlighted sector was titled *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century*, which was the focus of this case. The museum described the exhibition as an "expanded interpretation and an expanded emphasis on interdisciplinary themes and the breadth of the American experience" (Newark Museum of Art, 2016).

Layers of American Identity. According to the Newark Museum of Art website, the exhibition *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century* shows *1900 to present*. The webpage displays Robert Henri's *Portrait of Willie Gee* and Stuart Davis' *Shapes of Landscape Space*. In total, 11 cultural movements were included in the exhibition: *Into the Modern Era; Indigenous Modern; Stieglitz, O'Keeffe, and the 291 Circle; Traversing America; The Harlem Renaissance; The City in the Machine Age; Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism; Latin American Abstraction; Civil Rights and the Art of Identity; Expanding Pop; and Pop Culture and Religion in Contemporary Art.*

In Figure 5, the number of works within each theme are compiled. 143 works were in the 20th and 21st century wing. *Into the Modern Era* showed five works (3.4%), *Indigenous Modern* showed 13 shows (9.1%), *Stieglitz, O'Keeffe, and the 291 Circle* showed 16 works (11.2%), *Traversing America* displays 18 showed (12.6%), *The Harlem Renaissance* showed nine works (6.3%), *The City in the Machine Age* showed 17 works (11.9%), *Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism* showed 22 works (15.4%), *Latin American Abstraction* showed 11 works (7.7%), *Civil Rights and the Art of Identity* showed 7 works (4.9%), *Expanding Pop* showed 13 works (9.1%), and *Pop Culture and Religion in Contemporary Art* showed 12 works (8.4%). Based on the wall text documents, the identities displayed in this exhibition are *immigrant, Indigenous, urban, rural, African American, industrial, European emigrant, Latino, Native American, women, LGBTQ+,* and *spiritual.*

Figure 5

Bar Graph Depicting the Works in the Separate Galleries of Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century

Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century Galleries
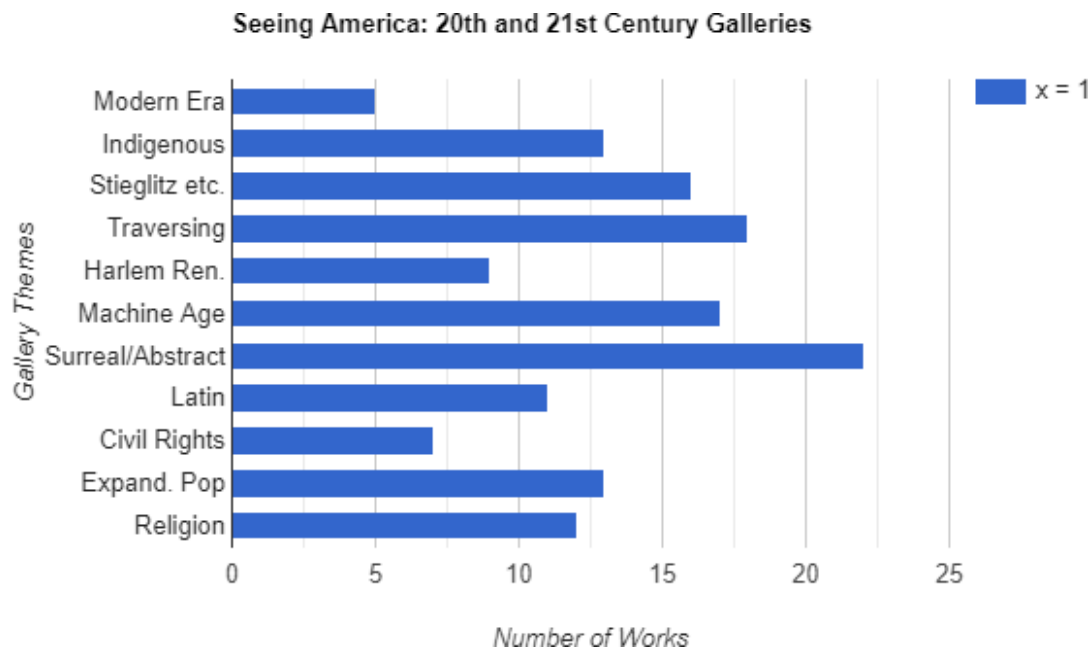
Seeing America displayed multiple mediums, styles, and imagery, which encompassed the various facets of American identity and experience in the past 120 years. To make the exhibition for a more diverse set of people, the wall texts were shown in both English and Spanish. The Henry Luce Foundation sponsored two exhibition catalogues: *Seeing America: Native Artists of North America* and *Seeing America: The Arc of Abstraction*. The latter is the catalogue that encompasses the themes of *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*.

Eleven contributors and 10 separate essays were evident in the catalogue, not including the foreword. The themes of the essays were: The History of Abstraction, Nature and Abstraction, Color, Found Objects, Before Abstract Expressionism, Gestural Style, Music, Material Expressions, The Biomorph, and Beyond Minimalism. Each essay related the works in

the exhibition to the stated themes, also highlighting historical and contemporary societal issues regarding to the concepts of the artworks. For example, Tricia Laughlin Bloom highlighted Melvin Edwards' works in the opening essay *The Arc of Abstraction*. Edwards was a sculptor known for his series *Lynch Fragments,* which is a number of sculptures made from found objects such as nails, chains, scissors, rakes, knives, tire irons, axes, locks, and fragments of fence. According to Bloom (2019), the tools "allude to sweeping history of racial violence against African Americans, from slavery to lynching to mass incarceration" (p. 23). Two of Edwards' works were included in the *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century* exhibition. Another example from the catalogue is the examination of the correlation of abstract art and music by William Coleman. Coleman notes the works of Italian artist Joseph Stella, who was frequently inspired by the African American conceived jazz music in the visual abstractions of Stella's work. Coleman also discussed the same jazz influence evident in the works of Stuart Davis. However, Stuart Davis' art was a direct product of the booming Newark jazz scene.

The Newark Museum of Art captured various characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of American cultural identity in the exhibition *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century*. The reinterpretation and reinstallation was possible because of the institutional efforts to modernize the museum to fit the contemporary needs of their community.

Community Engagement

The data showed that both the Montclair Art Museum and the Newark Museum of Art were proficient in providing accessible resources for visitors. The institutions also offered a wide range of programs relating to their exhibitions, and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Montclair Art Museum relies primarily on temporary exhibitions for their programming. Each museum displays different artists with rotating themes and guest curators.

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The Newark Museum of Art has more gallery space than the Montclair Art Museum. The museum houses multiple permanent/long-term exhibitions, including *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century*.

For *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*, the Montclair Art Museum hired an outside curator who was an expert in the subject. Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw is an African American woman who was able to provide insight on the selection and placement of the works. Although the Newark Museum of Art did not hire an outside curator for *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century*, the exhibition was a part of the modernization and rebrand conceived by their newly instated director and CEO, Linda Harrison, who is an African American woman. Both institutions are historically relevant in their communities, but as the data presents, the Newark Museum of Art was one of the first museums that resembled a modern interactive institution in America. These foundational aspects set a precedent for future cultivation of programs and exhibitions.

Both museums presented themselves as accessible institutions. By definition, *accessibility* means to be accessible to all people (Albrecht, 2006). *Physical accessibility* (available and convenient for everyone regardless of physical or financial disabilities), and *cognitive accessibility* (content is understandable and digestible for most groups of people) (Henry et al., 2014; Rhodes, 2007) are both prominent in the museum sphere. Accessibility in both ways is crucial in maintaining community trust (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008).

Montclair Art Museum

Empathy for the Community. Traditionally, the word *empathy* is defined as the ability to feel into another person's experiences and react according to that experience (Hodges & Myers, 2007). Gokcigdem (2019) states that museums should explore humanity's

interconnectedness through the design of exhibitions and with institutional actions such as programming.

The Montclair Art Museum demonstrated empathy through visitor accessibility, programming, and educational resources. A website section directly related to accessibility for visitors with disabilities was evident. In this section, the museum stated the location of the handicap parking and the wheelchair access at each entrance. Linked on the Visit page was a separate Accessibility page. On this page, the museum described different ways in which the museum accommodates various disabilities and handicaps including wheelchair users, blind and/or deaf people, and those with mental illnesses (such as those with anxiety disorders or mood disorders).

The museum also offered 13 different ticket discounts. Some of these discounts included: free admission for those attending Montclair Public Schools, free admission for those receiving food assistance, free admission for staff of other museums, and free admission for those who are unemployed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum offers free admission to immunocompromised people on Friday mornings from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

The programming that was examined in the data largely coincides with recent exhibitions, which reinforced the themes of the exhibitions. The programs are also designed to foster reflection and introspection in the visitors. For example, programs directly connected to *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*—three reoccurring programs and three one-time programs. The ongoing programs were public tours of the exhibition, three community conversation led by various members of the community including members of the Undoing Racism Committee and the mayor of Montclair. A Reflection Space was also implemented which was a visitor interactive program built into the exhibition. The Reflection Space provided

immediate support for the imagery in *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*.

Signage in the gallery led people to this room:

> Visitors are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments in response to this
>
> exhibition in the Museum's Reflection Space located in the Vance Wall Art Education
>
> Center on the first floor. They can also participate in collaborative activities in the Family
>
> Learning Lab on the Museum's third floor. (Montclair Art Museum, 2018b)

The other programs included Educator's Evening: Kara Walker: Using Art to Teach Difficult History, in which the museum educators presented a program about the history of slavery within Walker's works. The 32nd Annual Julia Norton Babson Lecture, Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works featured curator Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw. A panel discussion called From Kara Walker to Colon Kaepernick: Racial Justice Advocacy through Art and Media was executed, which combined the racial themes in the exhibition with the racism in today's popular culture. This panel was held at Montclair State University. Celebrated media figures participated in the panel, such as: Soledad O'Brien (Hearst Television, HBO Real Sports), Joy Reid (MSNBC) and Kai Wright (WNYC) and James E. Johnson (Brennan Center for Justice).

As another portrayal of empathy and connection to the community, the museum showed evidence of connection to the education field through local schools. The data showed educational resources available to schools in the area. The provided programs were largely interdisciplinary and were meant to coincide with the class curriculum that has been set by the State of New Jersey. The Educator Guides that were offered relate art and other museum objects to subjects such as English and Social Studies. The guides were meant to facilitate meaningful conversation

within the classroom and to foster a unique understanding of the subject matter. The Montclair

Art Museum also provided virtual resources during the COVID-19 pandemic through Virtual

MAM, which incorporated virtual museum tours, virtual collection and exhibition spotlights,

Zoom studio visits, videos from artists, and various family activities (Montclair Art Museum,

2020).

TripAdvisor and *Yelp* both displayed various reviews alluding to accessibility, programs,

and education. *TripAdvisor* had 129 reviews total for the Montclair Art Museum. Out of those

129 reviews, 57 (44.2%) were *excellent* or five stars, 48 (37.2%) were *very good* or four stars, 18

(14%) were *average* or three stars, four (3.1%) were *poor* or two stars, and two (1.6%) were

terrible or one star.

Figure 6 indicates the specific keywords that were searched in both the *TripAdvisor* and

Yelp reviews and the number of reviews in each keyword. The keywords were *community*, *free*,

exhibition/exhibit, *programs/activities*, *collection*, *education*, and *family*.

In the 129 *TripAdvisor* reviews, six (4.7%) specifically mentioned the *community*, 23

(17.8%) mentioned *free* admission, 80 (62%) mentioned the *exhibitions* on view, 10 (7.8%)

mentioned the *programs/activities* at the museum, 41 (31.8%) noted the museum's *collection*,

three (2.3%) mention the *education* available, and six (4.7%) mentioned the museum's access to

families. Although majority of the reviews were positive, some outlier reviews fell into the

negative categories. The negative reviews mostly refer to the museum's emphasis on temporary

exhibitions, because when they transition between exhibitions, there are only a few galleries that

are open for viewing. The museum made a consistent effort to respond to both the positive and

negative reviews.

Yelp showed 53 reviews total for the Montclair Art Museum. Out of those 53 reviews, 24

(45.3%) were five stars, 17 (32.1%) were four stars, five (9.4%) were three stars, three (5.7%) were two stars, and four (7.5%) were one star.

Figure 6 displays the *Yelp* reviews in comparison to the *TripAdvisor* reviews. Out of the 53 *Yelp* reviews, 11 (20.8%) mention the *community*, 16 (30.2%) mention *free* admission, 32 (60.4%) mention the museum *exhibitions*, four (7.5%) mention the *programs/activities*, 10 (18.9%) note the *collections* of the institution, one (1.9) mentions the *education*, and eight (15.1%) mention access to *families*. As with *TripAdvisor*, the reviews are mostly positive, but there are also negative reviews. Negative reviews about the temporary exhibition transitions were evident. One outlier review claimed one of the security guards was profiling two visitors based on their race. The museum responded to both positive and negative reviews.

Figure 6

Bar Graph Showing the Various Online Reviews for the Montclair Art Museum
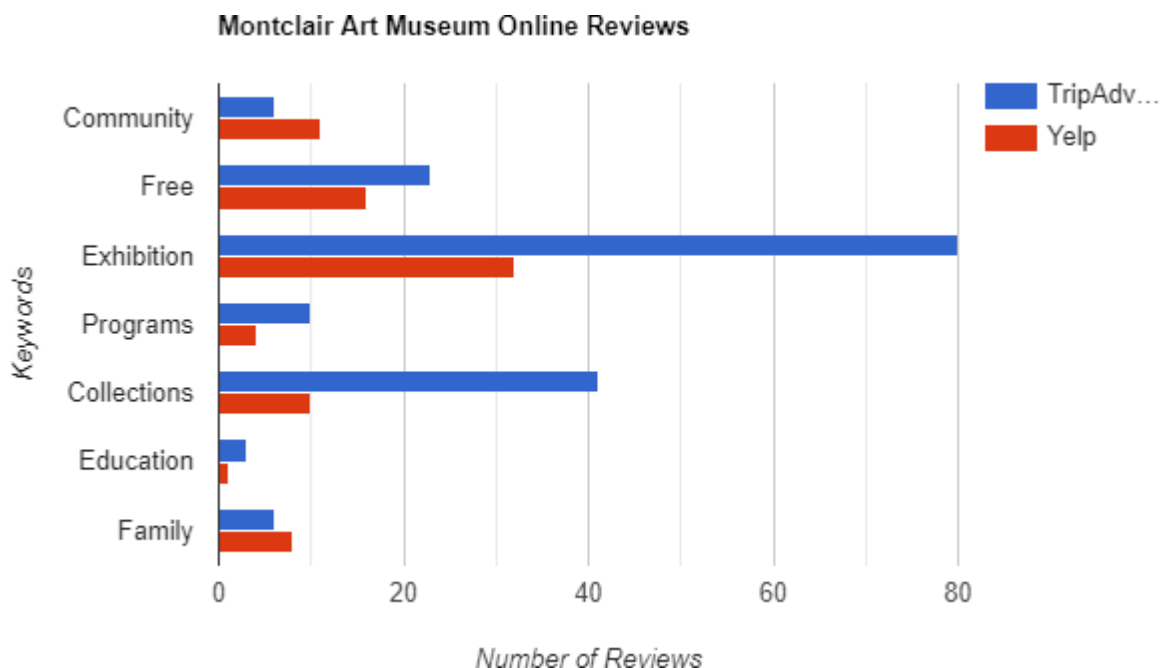
BIPOC and Local Visibility. With the depictions of difficult subject matter and the empathy for the community, the theme in the data was Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and local visibility. The Montclair Art Museum's stated mission statement encompasses themes of community engagement and diversity, so adherence to this mission would be displayed through consistent promotion of a diverse set of artists and community members.

The featured artist of the exhibition *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* is a Black woman. Walker's commentary on systemic racism and colonialism represents her position in society, which is shown through the imagery in her art. The museum acquired the exhibition's centerpiece work *Virginia's Lynch Mob* through the artist's primary affiliated gallery Sikkema Jenkins & Co., located in New York City. The work was purchased with the museum's Centennial Fund, which is a percentage of a large endowment that the museum received in 2014 at its centennial. The fund is described as the following:

> The Museum created the $1 million Fund in its Centennial year, 2014, with monies restricted to purchasing works of art and sought artworks that would make a significant impact on audiences, raise the Museum's profile in the realm of contemporary art, and complement its historical collections, thus setting the Museum on a rising trajectory at the start of a new century. (ArtDaily, 2016)

Along with Walker's work, the museum also purchased two other works by Black artists Nick Cave and Mickalene Thomas using the money from the Centennial Fund (ArtDaily, 2016). These acquisitions were relevant because they show the museum's effort in purchasing artworks from BIPOC artists.

The museum also has a long-time collaboration with Black artist Ben Jones. At the same time as the Kara Walker exhibition, Jones installed a large mural in the stairwell of the museum called *Envision Empower Embrace*. Along with demonstrating themes of environmentalism, the artwork also commented on the socio-political climate at the time, incorporating images of Donald Trump, Trayvon Martin, and Sandra Bland—directly referencing the Black Lives Matter Movement (Montclair Art Museum, 2018c).

Ben Jones is responsible for establishing the African American Cultural Committee (AACC) at the Montclair Art Museum with other local Black cultural figures—artist Janet Taylor Pickett and writer Valerie Wilson Wesley. The Montclair Art Museum's AACC webpage states that "the AACC is a bridge between the Museum and various communities by forging meaningful connections through outreach and programs, shared values and vision on a local and international level" and the stated mission is to "sustain and maintain the legacy of artists in the African Diaspora." 46 members of the African American community were recorded as being involved in the AACC. Multiple programs were associated with this committee, including the Annual AACC Film Forum and multiple jazz performances featuring prominent jazz local jazz figureheads and international jazz figureheads. The AACC also annually hosted a cultural trip for its members to foster international education.

The primary curator of *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* was Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw. Shaw was not an employee of the Montclair Museum of Art but was hired by the museum specifically for the Kara Walker exhibition because of her expertise on the subject matter (La Gorce, 2018). Shaw is a Black woman who has worked on multiple projects comprising of African American Art. Shaw's first book was titled *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*, and she has curated shows such as *Portraits of a People: Picturing African*

Americans in the Nineteenth Century at the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Massachusetts, and *Represent: African American Art* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Much of Shaw's scholarship is based around African American Studies and well as Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies (La Gorce, 2018).

Newark Museum of Art

Historical Relevance. In Chapter 2, the history of museums and their connection to public was briefly explained. In this history, the Newark Museum, founded in 1909, was discussed as being a revolutionary institution for its time. The founder, John Cotton Dana believed that "museums were established to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts and sciences" (Newark Museum of Art, n.d.). As noted by Kern (2016), the Newark Museum was one of the first institutions to promote community engagement and interaction as well as the first institution to exhibit living artists. This history compelled the museum to proclaim itself as "one of the most progressive cultural institutions in the country" (Newark Museum of Art, n.d.). The Newark Museum of Art's stated mission statement is one sentence: "We welcome everyone with inclusive experiences that spark curiosity and foster community" (Newark Museum of Art, 2020a). This statement is emphasized in their community engagement efforts, and the consistent resources provided for the community.

Most recently, the museum established various programs and initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the initiatives was called PLACE, which is an acronym for Promoting Legislative and Community Engagement (Newark Museum of Art, 2020b). The webpage is a gathering of links to local outreach programs such as their partnership with the nonprofit called MEND (Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity), COVID-19 assistance programs, links to show support for other Newark organizations, links to inform citizens of the

actions of their local officials and state legislators, and links to community engagement throughout Newark.

According to the Newark Museum of Art website (2020c), the museum transformed many of its programs into virtual experiences for the community because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual center for the museum is called #NMoAatHome, which is sponsored by Bank of America, and brings a schedule of virtual programs to people of all ages and backgrounds. Through this response, the museum offered programs such as virtual homeschool classes with interdisciplinary subjects, virtual studio visits with various artists (local and international), comedy shows, the annual Newark Museum Association meeting, stories about ancient civilizations, a diversity and inclusion workshop, and a happy hour with cultural figures. Virtual talks and panels were implemented, which are consistently updated, as well as virtual public tours for solo visitors and groups. The museum also designed a virtual escape room that is directly based on the Ballantine House, which is located at the museum (Newark Museum of Art, 2020d).

The museum produced a range of virtual homeschool programs which used the museum's values and collections to promote interactive educational techniques (Newark Museum of Art, 2020c). Experiences such as virtual storytelling, guided art projects, and songs were evident. With the closure of the museum's planetarium, they provided virtual astronomy resources such as Ask an Astronomer. For educators, virtual field trips were offered for four different age groups: grades one-two, grades three-five, grades six-eight, and high school. Notably, the high school programs incorporated programs such as African Art and African American Art, and American Identity through Immigrant and Migrant Artists.

Teachers were provided resources to utilize in their classrooms, which are in the form of educational videos based on the museum's collections. The museum provided a curriculum guide, which was described as guiding the educators to connect art to the subjects in their classrooms.

The museum's efforts to unify the museum with schools is also bolstered with its Professional Development program for Educators. The museum instructed educators on how to facilitate learning through objects and artworks. They offer a free virtual diversity and inclusion workshop for all educators annually, and a free virtual professional development session for early childhood learning.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the museum's most popular programs was their Late Thursday event. The museum would open from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. one Thursday per month, and offered free admission, food, drinks, and entertainment during these events.

The museum promoted the local community through the programs Community Day and Brick City Stories. Community Day is supported by Horizon Foundation for NJ and is presented once a month, with a different cultural focus every month. The program was virtual, but the museum provides a full day of stories, classes, and interactive activities. Some of the Community Day themes included: Celebrating Carnival, Day of the Dead, MLK Jr. Celebration, A Reflection on the '67 Newark Uprising: Then and Now, Celebrating Pride, and Celebrating Earth. The second program, Brick City Stories, displayed stories by artists that work in Newark. This webpage includes a virtual exhibition link, displaying various Newark-based artists, and studio snapshots of the promoted artists. The studio snapshots were short videos in which the artists discussed their background, inspiration, and their connection to Newark. The page also included artist's talks and panels. A Roundtable Talk was presented showing Newark artists' lives during

the events of 2020 and two artists talks from Newark artists Jo-el Lopez and Willie Cole were also presented. Both of these artists were featured in *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*.

The *TripAdvisor* and *Yelp* reviews were also examined to gage the community's response to the museum. On *TripAdvisor*, 285 reviews total were displayed. Out of those 285 reviews, 194 (68%) were *excellent* or five stars, 76 (26.7%) were *very good* or four stars, 11 (3.9%) were *average* or three-stars, zero (0%) were *poor* or two stars, and four (1.4%) were *terrible* or one star.

Figure 7 shows the reviews from *TripAdvisor* and *Yelp* using the same keywords as the Montclair Art Museum case: *community*, *free*, *exhibition/exhibit*, *programs/activities*, *collection*, *education*, and *family.*

From the 285 *TripAdvisor* reviews, two (0.7%) specifically mention the *community*, 27 (9.5%) describe *free* admission or events, 133 (46.7%) note the *exhibitions*, 30 (10.55) mention *the programs/activities*, 75 (26.3%) mention the *collections*, 14 (4.9%) mention the *education*, and 43 (15.1%) describe the access to *families*. Out of the four *terrible* reviews, only one is in English and states that the children and teenagers were not engaged by the content of the museum.

Yelp had 63 reviews total for the Newark Museum of Art. Out of these 63 reviews, 28 (44.4%) were five stars, 27 (42.9%) were four stars, four (6.3%) were three stars, one (1.6%) was two stars, and three (4.8%) were one star. In Figure 4, the *Yelp* reviews are compared to the *TripAdvisor* reviews, using the same keywords. Out of the 63 reviews, two (3.2%) mention the *community*, 10 (15.9%) mention *free* admission or events, 28 (44.4%) note the *exhibitions*, six (9.5%) mention the *programs/activities*, 19 (30.2%) mention the *collections*, five (7.9%) mention

the *education*, and seven (11.1%) note the access to *families*. The one and two star reviews mostly note that the galleries were not engaging for non-adults.

Figure 7

Bar Graph Showing the Various Online Reviews for the Newark Museum of Art

Newark Museum of Art Online Reviews
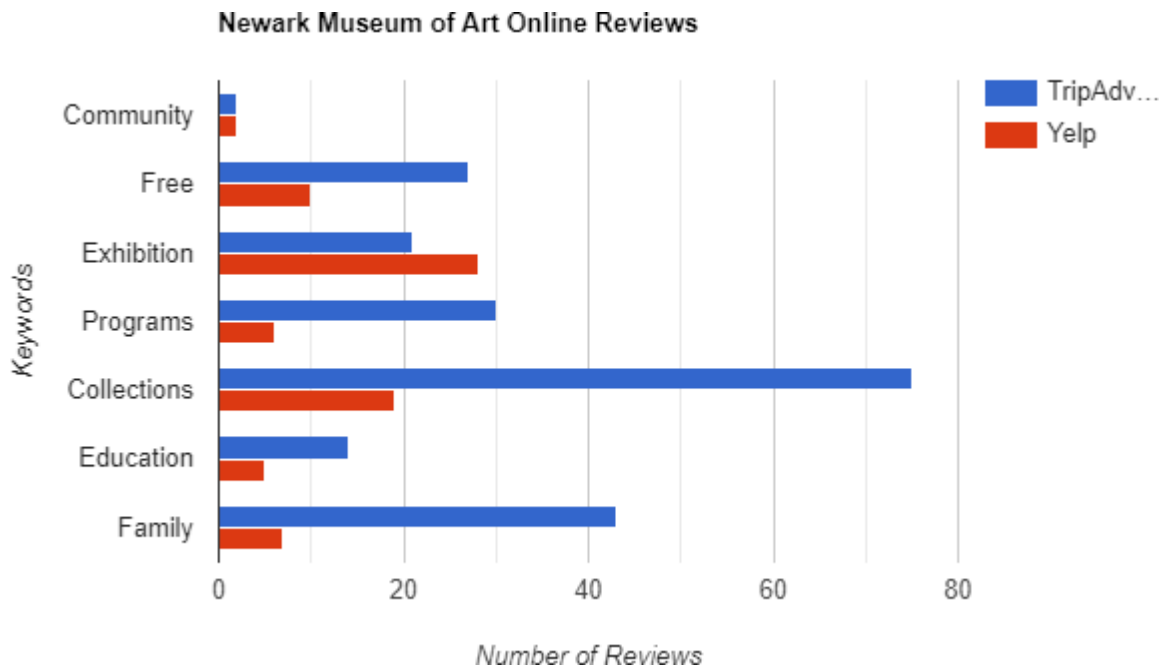
Along with community engagement, continued historic relevance was shown with the museum's diversity in their employment. On October 10th, 2018, it was announced that Linda Harrison would be appointed as the new director and Chief Executive Officer of the Newark Museum. Harrison is one of only five African American museum directors in the entire country. According to the employment page on the website:

> During her first 100 days, Linda developed a 3-year Strategic Vision Plan to transform
> the museum, adding a sense of urgency and a bold vision. Her plan expanded the notion

of a logo upgrade into a major brand transformation, involving a re-engineering of the

mission, brand image, and adding the clarifying words 'of Art' to the museum's name.

(Newark Museum of Art, n.d.)

As another structural change for historic relevance, Harrison implemented an all-women senior

leadership team, which included the vice president/deputy director of external Affairs, the deputy

director of collections and curatorial strategies, the deputy director of learning and engagement,

and the chief financial officer/deputy director of infrastructure. This group of women was

established to assist in Harrison's three-year vision plan for the museum.

Physical and Theoretical Revitalization. In November 2019, the Newark Museum of

Art announced that it would be changing its name from the *Newark Museum* to the *Newark

Museum of Art*. This name change would memorialize an ongoing evolution of the museum. The

stated goal for the last five years, supported by numerous press releases published by the

museum, has been to modernize the museum, which would enhance community engagement and

cement the museum as a cultural landmark in the city of Newark. The name change was a shift in

marketing focus, but it also marked the physical transformations that the museum executed.

In a press release from January 2018 titled *Newark Museum Greatly Enhances Its

Visibility and Community Engagement*, the museum announced several physical enhancements

that took place throughout 2017 including a new museum entrance on a popular city street, a

public terrace for community gathering, a wheelchair ramp that would officially make the

museum fully accessible, a handicap lift, and a new special exhibition space which is 5,000

square feet with wood floors, new ceilings and walls.

The changes supported the emphasis on cultural collections since various reinstallations began in 2016. A 2016 press release titled *Newly Reinstalled Galleries Showcase Newark Museum's Holdings of Native American Art: Native Artists of North America: Long Term Installation* explains that the vast holdings of historical American and Canadian holdings, which are largely indigenous in nature, would be reinterpreted and redisplayed at a higher quality to emphasize the history of the objects. The director at the time, Steve Kern, stated in that same press release (2016): "This exhibition is about widening the story of American history to include underrepresented artistic and cultural voices, and introducing Newark and New Jersey audiences to American Art that better reflects them and the world around them." This was the beginning of various reinterpretation of objects throughout the institution.

In 2017, the museum announced an acquisition of a video installation artwork by William Kentridge, a South African artist, in preparation for their major reinstallation of the Global Africa Collection. Later in 2017, the revitalized and reinterpreted display of this collection was announced. The museum physically enhanced a large amount of their spaces throughout 2017. The renovated gallery spaces housed this reimagined collection. The head curator of this effort, Christa Clarke (2016), commented: "The works presented in our gallery showcase the great range and diversity of the Museum's collection. They acknowledge and illustrate the cultural complexity of the continent and its global ties, past and present. We think they will offer our visitors a very different vision of 'African art.'"

In 2019, the name change of the institution marked the pivot of the institution that was physically and fundamentally occurring since the revitalizations of the Native American collections in 2016. The newly instated director Linda Harrison, an African American woman, hoped that the new name would change the museum's image in the community. In the local

newspaper *The Star Ledger* (2019), Harrison explained that in community surveys, many citizens were unaware of the museum's purpose. *NJ Spotlight News* (2019) stated "50% of people surveyed had a general lack of knowledge about the museum's focus." Many people thought the museum was a history museum or a museum presenting facts about the City of Newark. In the *Star Ledger* article, Harrison stated:

> I come from a world where we must reimagine the notion of what a museum is or we lose that museum as being an anchor in the city and being a place that people can relate to and consider it a museum. That's the challenge of museums across the country…We want to be a relevant museum for people who live here, and for the people who are coming here. (Carter, 2019)

The idea of community relevancy through this evolution was emphasized through the vast programming that was connected to the name change. A 2019 titled *The Newark Museum of Art: A New Name for New Jersey's Largest Art and Culture Institution* detailed the museum's name change, as well as the community activities that would celebrate the change. The rebrand was announced as a part of a large community celebration which would offer food and drink from various Newark restaurants. Admission was offered free of charge with various tours held. By changing the name, and by providing the community access during the announcement, Harrison hoped that community members would change their perspective on the purpose of the museum.

Summary

In this chapter, the data from the two cases that were a part of the multi-case study for this qualitative research project was collected, analyzed and then reported. The case data was divided between two themes, in which subthemes from both institutions were organized. The

first theme was (1) exhibiting topics of race and identity, in which the Montclair Art Museum

(MAM) subtheme was displaying difficult subject matter and the Newark Museum of Art

(NMA) subtheme was layers of American identity. The second subtheme was (2) community

engagement, in which the MAM subthemes were (a) empathy for the community, and (b) BIPOC

and local visibility, and the NMA subthemes were (a) historical relevance, and physical and

theoretical revitalizations. The multi-case study displayed various collective patterns. Both

institutions implement consistent and updated community programming and a large amount of

educational resources. Both remain accessible to most people and accommodate the specific

needs of most people, while promoting diversity in content. The institutions both showed

evidence of receiving input from experts in their attempts to display difficult subject matter.

Support of community organizations and artists was evident at both museums, as they are both a

cultural center for the community with societally relevant installations. These patterns potentially

answer the research question:

> **RQ:** How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and
>
> identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

In the following chapter, this research project concludes with a set of recommendations

for mid-sized art institutions on how to produce and support exhibitions with topics of race and

identity to bolster community trust, based on the Findings in this chapter and the patterns that

were observed in the data.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Introduction

This project sought to respond to the growing need for cultural institutions to confront the systemic racism that is within their foundations. As stated in Chapter 1, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 sparked a surge in accountability, especially in the museum field. For museums, this systemic racism stems from the European museum model, which was designed for the upper class, educated, white male (Shubert, 2016).

The mission of most museums is framed in the tradition of public service, as well as the attempt increase educational resources. They are increasingly focused on cultivating programs and producing exhibitions with topics of race and identity to educate the public on these topics. However, the museum as an institution is rooted in colonial ideology (Schubert, 2016), which includes principles rooted in systemic racism (Delgado et al., 2017). These principles are evident through the hiring process, governing boards, grants, donations, programs, mission statement and community outreach, marketing, and public relations. If a museum's exhibitions and programs are imbued with principles rooted in systemic racism, the institution is not existing to the standard of their stated mission and the Code of Ethics for Museums (American Alliance of Museums, 2000; International Council of Museums, 2017). This fact could alienate a large population due to the loss of trust in the authenticity of an institution (De Montebello et al., 2004).

The researcher chose to focus the scope of the project on mid-sized art museums because of the accessibility to study this stated problem. The stated problem led to the following research question:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

Chapter 2 contextualized this research question with a review of the scholarly and professional literature related to the themes of (1) exhibiting different cultures and social issues, with the subthemes of (a) critical race theory, (b) curating cultural topics, and (c) social issues in museums, (2) modern curatorial practice, with the subthemes of (a) defining a curator, (b) the history and evolution of curating, and (c) producing and exhibition, and (3) the museum as a public institution, with the subthemes of (a) a brief history on the museum and the public, and (b) museums and relevancy. In Chapter 3, the choice and rationale for research method, data collection, and analysis methods were stated. The research method was a qualitative *multi-case study* report on the Montclair Art Museum's *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* and the Newark Museum of Art's *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*. The data collection method was *document analysis*. The data was then analyzed utilizing *open coding* and *cross-case synthesis*. Through the document collection and the data analysis, it was evident that both institutions were working to fight the issue of systemic racism in their museums. This was revealed through the patterns excavated through coding, which were: consistent and updated community programming, vast educational resources, accessible to most people, accommodates the specific needs of most people, promotes diversity in content, receives input from experts, difficult subject matter displayed, support of community organizations and artists, cultural center for community, and societally relevant installations.

In this chapter, the research question is answered by integrating the themes of literature with the patterns that emerged from the findings. Following discussion of the patterns, five

recommendations were then stated for future actions in mid-sized art institutions, and the strengths, limitations, and further research recommendations were explained.

Discussion

According to the review of the literature, to produce an exhibition with topics of race and identity, mid-sized art museums must constantly evolve to tailor their content to the specific needs of their immediate surrounding communities (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008; O'Neill, 2016; Simon, 2016; Stanish, 2008). Prominent patterns that emerged from the literature in this regard were updated accessible galleries (Camerero et al., 2011; Hooper-Greenhill, 2008), substantial educational programming (Heumann Gurian, 2006), and immersive and interactive experiences (Dierking & Falk, 2011; Falk, 2009). Patterns also included partnerships with community organizations (Gardner, 2019; Reilly & Lippard, 2018), hired outside expertise (Obrist, 2011), support of local artists (Sheikh, 2016), and input from different cultural communities (Eilat, 2016). The literature also showed patterns of confrontation of difficult histories (Wajid & Minott, 2019), and facilitation of introspection through object selection and placement (Dierking & Falk, 2018; Ostrander, 2016).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), racism is prominent in all realms of culture, including the history that is presented and taught in most educational systems. Willis (2017) emphasized this point that systemic racism is evident through the education that most people receive in institutions such as schools, libraries, museums, and churches. An imbalance regarding the education that white people receive in comparison to their BIPOC counterparts is still present (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Being anti-racist in the museum field means correcting this imbalance while also presenting accurate information (Reilly & Lippard, 2018; Wajid & Minott, 2019).

One of the patterns that was revealed in both the literature and the multi-case study was the updated accessible galleries. Hooper-Greenhill (2008) emphasized the necessity of accessibility for the community through exhibitions in museums. This could come in the form of wall texts and subsequent educational programming to provide context for the objects which facilitates meaning-making in the institutions. Along with educational accessibility, community accessibility is also necessary through revitalized digital efforts and other types of renovations (Camarero et al., 2011), which also boosts the institution's relevancy (Simon, 2016). At the Montclair Art Museum, this accessibility was evident through the thematic context provided for the exhibition *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works.* For example, although the subject matter was graphic in nature, the museum's educational department crafted a program specifically for children to explain slavery and the lasting effects of racism (Montclair Art Museum, 2018d). The museum also provided various accommodations, which includes 13 different ticket discount opportunities, free parking, and various tour options for those who have disabilities. At the Newark Museum of Art, the staff provides various context options through wall text—the wall text is shown in both English and Spanish. The museum also produced various renovations throughout 2017 that were aimed at community accessibility, which included a new museum entrance, a handicap lift, a public terrace for community gathering, a wheelchair ramp, and a new special exhibition space.

Along with accessibility, another pattern is the large amount of educational programming. According to AAM's seminal 1992 report *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, education should be a foundational aspect of a museum (Hirzy, 1992). Wajid and Minott (2016) stated that the programming must be culturally relevant and updated, connecting the visitor to contemporary social themes. Both the Montclair Art

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Museum and the Newark Museum of Art exemplify this with their comprehensive series of programming. The Montclair Art Museum showed the themes of *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* with various programs. Most prominent were the panel discussion about racism in popular culture at Montclair University and a discussion about the exhibition led by figureheads of organizations such as the Undoing Racism committee, the Montclair Historical Society, and the mayor of Montclair. At the Newark Museum of Art, the permanent installation *Seeing America: 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ Century* was an updated and reinstalled exhibition. The exhibition was a part of a large renovation of the museum, which incorporated a day-long celebration for the city of Newark with free admission and various tours of the exhibition with its opening. Both institutions also implemented various facets of virtual programming as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Montclair Art Museum, 2020; Newark Museum of Art, 2020c).

Both the cases and the literature revealed a pattern of displaying difficult subject matter. Regarding race and identity, the literature emphasizes curatorial activism (Reilly & Lippard, 2018), consulting or hiring authentic expertise (Obrist, 2011), and a connection between the past and the present (Eilat, 2016). The subjects of both *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* and *Seeing America: 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ Century* exemplified curatorial activism. The former displayed the difficult subject matter of slavery and systemic racism, and the latter was a multi-theme exhibition displaying various cultural movements, racism, LGBTQ rights, and social justice. For the Kara Walker exhibition, the hired a curator that was an expert on the artist which "bridged a gap," in the knowledge and authenticity (Obrist, 2011, p. 117). The Newark Museum hired an African American woman, Linda Harrison, as their new director in 2019, making her one in only five African American directors in the country.

The patterns excavated from this multi-case study compared to the patterns in the literature, made it possible to answer the research question:

RQ: How can mid-sized art museums produce exhibitions with topics of race and identity to address systemic racism and build community trust?

The recommendations below are intended for mid-sized art museums, because two mid-sized art museums were examined in the case study, and because of the strengths and limitations of smaller institutions which was stated in Chapter 1. Mid-sized art museums generally have a stronger bond with their immediate communities—community members rely on museums to be a cultural asset to the area, while museums rely on the community members for continued relevancy (Pfieffer, 2019). Because of this increased bond, smaller museums are more flexible when responding to local wants and needs (Petersen, 2019), and therefore, may develop a stronger trust with the public. The recommendations represent actions from both mid-sized institutions in the case study, which other institutions can emulate.

Recommendations

Diversify Museum Staff and Expertise

At a foundational level, museums must strive to diversify their staff and their partnerships. The museum should look to research diverse expertise in the curatorial department or for the subsequent programming, to constantly partner with this expertise, or to hire them as staff. According to Obrist (2011), having diverse staff or diverse expertise authenticates the curatorial process by "bridging the gap" between the institution and the subject matter (p. 117). O'Neill (2016) emphasized a similar point—to display cultural objects and ideas, the museums must consult members of that specific culture to increase authenticity. By hiring diverse staff and

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partnering with diverse expertise for exhibitions and programs, museums automatically increase

the authenticity of the general content that is being displayed and taught. For example, the

Newark Museum of art recently diversified its staff with its complete institutional revitalization.

Linda Harrison, an African American woman, was hired as the museum director and the Chief

Executive Officer. She is one of only five African American museum directors in the United

States. The Montclair Art Museum also diversified its expertise within the Kara Walker

exhibition. Through their Centennial Fundraiser, they allotted specific funds to hire Gwendolyn

DuBois Shaw, an African American woman, who is a scholarly expert on Kara Walker. Through

hiring these women, the museum increased their connection with diverse audiences, and also

further legitimized their content related to race and identity.

Provide Consistent and Relevant Educational Resources

Education is the foundation of the museum as an institution. For a museum to show its

constant commitment to relevancy, it should provide consistent educational resources that are

relevant to the needs of its surrounding community. Educational resources could potentially be

classes or workshops (offered to various age groups), tours related to the exhibitions, various

programs (related to the exhibitions or not), guides for educators, and special events partnering

with other organizations or businesses. By providing various educational resources, the museum

displays its steady commitment to fostering a connection between the public and the museum's

exhibitions and collections. Dierking and Falk (2018) stated that today's society is a *learning*

society, meaning that humans place importance in well-rounded intellectual strengths. Because

of this, many people look towards museum to fill gaps in their knowledge. With recent

technological advancements, museums also must work to remain societally relevant in their

programming and other methods of education. Winesmith and Anderson (2020) explained that

many museums are implementing new forms of virtual education in order to reach people that might not be able to physically visit the museum. In 2020, virtual educational resources were especially relevant, because the COVID-19 pandemic caused many of the museums to shut their doors. Both the Montclair Art Museum and the Newark Museum of Art provided consistent educational resources to the public, before and during the pandemic. In response to the recent crisis, both institutions adapted by creating a webpage with collections of virtual resources. The Montclair Art Museum created Virtual MAM, which incorporated virtual collection and exhibition spotlights, virtual tours, Zoom studio visits, videos from artists, and various family activities. The Newark Museum of Art created #NMOAatHome, which contained virtual film screenings, virtual workshops, virtual homeschool classes, Zoom interactive programs, virtual studio visits, and virtual educator classes. Through this virtual programming, both institutions responded to a relevant societal issue, which shows commitment to their communities.

Implement Multiple Layers of Accessibility

Accessibility is evident physically and cognitively. This implies that visitors can physically access the museum no matter their physical ability, and mentally access the museum by learning from the objects and programs. By implementing the broad idea of accessibility, museums must provide various accommodations for people with disabilities, offer discounted and free admission, display understandable and bilingual wall text, and produce programs to supplement the themes of the exhibition. Museums that demonstrate accessible actions also show an understanding of physical and cognitive diversity, which builds community trust (Hooper-Greenhill, 2008; Wajid & Minott, 2019). Both the Montclair Art Museum and the Newark Museum of Art have implemented numerous actions to show accessibility. This includes various accommodations for people with disabilities, free and discounted admission, and free programs.

The Montclair Art Museum supplemented the Kara Walker exhibition with numerous free programs to contextualize the imagery and themes evident in the show. One of the free programs was provided specifically for children, who were not advised to view the show. The Newark Museum of Art provided bilingual wall texts with the *Seeing America* exhibition. The museum consistently provides wall text in both English and Spanish to increase access to a diverse group of people. These actions do not require an excess of funding and are manageable for mid-sized institutions to implement.

Engage the Community

A mid-sized museum's immediate community is their most important audience. Building a relationship with this audience is crucial in establishing trust. The museum should work to build sustainable relationships with local businesses, artists, and organizations. Programs should be developed to promote these businesses and artists, as well as exhibitions directly displaying art by local artists. Dierking and Falk (2011) emphasized the growing popularity of museums in the public sphere, which means that museums must keep up constant engagement. One of the ways to increase engagement is to amplify voices in the community through programs and exhibitions (Gardner, 2019). This engagement increases public trust (De Montebello et al., 2004), because it displays the museum's efforts to connect (Stanish, 2008). If the public sees that the museum is promoting local businesses, artists, and organizations directly, they will trust the museum to be a positive force in the community. The Montclair Art Museum shows efforts in community engagement. As a counterpart to *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*, the museum partnered with Montclair University to host a panel discussion on racism in media. The Newark Museum of Art also emphasizes community engagement. Regarding *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century*, the museum hosted a large community activity day to bring

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community members into the new exhibition, which was housed in a revitalized and rebranded museum facility. The museum offered food and beverages from local restaurants, and provided local entertainment, which brought the community together to celebrate the cultural facets of the City of Newark. For both institutions, this programming reflects the mission statements, as both statements incorporate themes of community connection.

Display Difficult Subject Matter

After the events of 2020, museums must be more willing to consistently display difficult subject matter. Difficult subject matter means any topic that could potentially make people uncomfortable or upset, such as slavery, genocide, war, sexual assault, brutality, or any kind of extreme violence. Museums should not be afraid to be strategically provocative in the subjects of their exhibitions to facilitate hard conversations within their visitors. According to Reilly and Lippard (2018), museums are now being called to engage in curatorial activism, which is an aggressive confrontation of systemic racism within institutions. The authors define this term as willingness to "level hierarchies, challenge assumptions, counter erasure, promote the margins over the center, [promote the] minority over the majority, inspire intelligent debate, disseminate new knowledge, and encourage strategies of resistance." (p. 22) This is a direct result of the findings of Critical Race Theory. Because of the blatant revisionist history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), cultural institutions must work to promote un-learning many of the biases that are engrained in society, through confronting the histories that caused these biases (Willis, 2017). The Montclair Art Museum set a precedent with *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works*. Kara Walker's works display graphic images such as lynching, phallic shapes, nudity, defecation, racist motifs, sexual acts, and death, depicting the harsh realities of slavery and contemporary racism. Many of the visitor comments note that this exhibition was brave and

thought-provoking. At the Newark Museum of Art, the imagery in *Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century* display multi-faceted social justice themes and cultural moments such as the fight for civil rights, and the Harlem Renaissance. Whereas the Kara Walker exhibition was temporary, Seeing America is a long-term display, so these themes will be a constant background any other exhibitions that the museum produces. Both museums emphasize race and identity first and foremost, as a foundational aspect to their programming.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The primary strength of this multi-case study is the amount of data that was available for data collection and analysis. Each museum website was informative, detailing and archiving various programs and exhibitions. Staff at both institutions also provided physical documents, which supplemented the online materials, and the institutions and their endeavors were well-covered in various news outlets. The project had approximately 500 pages of data to collect and analyze.

The second strength is the various connections between the data and the literature review. Considering that much of the literature reports on model institutions, the data's alignment with the themes portrays successful patterns in the case study institutions.

Another strength is the narrow focus of the study. Because this study only incorporated two cases, the researcher was able to analyze a larger amount of data within the time constraints. If other cases were added within the study, there would be a smaller amount of collected data for each case. This also allowed the researcher to spend more time studying each case.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this project was the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the pandemic, the researcher was restricted from visiting the institutions and interviewing staff. The setting observation and interview methods were not employed in conjunction with document analysis, which limited the personal documentation included in the project. The project would have included curator interviews, and a detailed researcher description of each museum's galleries.

Another limitation of this project was the imbalance in physical documents received from the institutions. The Montclair Art Museum provided the researcher with a zip drive from the Kara Walker exhibition, which included 13 files filled with installation photos, various planning documents, and wall text. The Newark Art Museum provided the researcher with documents as well, but the files amount to four total. This means that slightly more data was available for the Kara Walker exhibition than the Seeing America exhibition.

The small scope of the project was another limitation. Although the researcher was able to collect and analyze more data because this project incorporated only two cases, this also limited the scope of research influence. The project was limited to two mid-sized art museums in New Jersey. Adding more institutions or larger institutions would allow the project to connect to a larger variety of institutions at its conclusion.

The last limitation is the subject matter within the museums. Many museums are confronting race and identity within their institutions, but this project specifically focused on art museums, rather than science or history museums. This fact also limited the scope of influence.

Further Research

Based on these limitations, expansion of this specific research topic is possible. Regarding the first and second limitations, a more thorough and balanced methodology could be conducted in a future without the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the lack of interviews with the curators setting observation, this project reported more on the institutions themselves, rather than the specific curatorial process involved in the specified exhibitions at the institutions. In further research, the curatorial processes and object placement would be further scrutinized and analyzed.

Based on the scope of limitations, the further research could potentially be expanded further than mid-sized art museums. If the research still focused on race and identity in art museums, it could examine art museums of various sizes to compare and contrast the data. The further research could also expand past art museums and study science or history museums to assess how they are displaying themes of race and identity.

Curating race and identity in museums is a theme that will especially after the social injustices of 2020. This project displayed part of this topic, but the further research could potentially explore other facets of this field through this lens.

Summary

This project sought to examine exhibitions displaying topics of race and identity and two prominent mid-sized art museums. In Chapter 1, the problem of residual systemic racism within museums was stated and explored. In Chapter 2, the literature within the themes of (1) exhibiting different cultures and social issues, (2) modern curatorial practice, and (3) museums and relevancy was synthesized. Chapter 3 explained the qualitative multi-case study method which

was used, as well as the document analysis, open coding and cross-case synthesis methods that were employed. In Chapter 4, the findings from the multi-case study investigating the *Kara Walker: Virginia's Lynch Mob and Other Works* exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum *and the Seeing America: 20th and 21st Century* exhibition at the Newark Museum of Art, were reported and analyzed. The themes that were revealed from these findings were (1) exhibiting topics of race and identity, and (2) community engagement. In the first theme, Montclair Art Museum subtheme was (1) displaying difficult subject matter, and Newark Art Museum subtheme was (1) layers of American identity. In the second theme, the Montclair Art Museum subthemes were (a) empathy for the community and (b) BIPOC and local visibility, and the Newark Museum of Art subthemes were (a) historical relevance and (b) physical and theoretical revitalizations. This chapter concluded the project by marrying the patterns from the case study with the themes from the literature review, and by giving five recommendations to mid-sized art museums for building public trust through their exhibitions and programming.

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