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They Tell Their Stories Still:
The Use of Storytelling and Narrative Exhibition Development to Communicate Native
American Art, History, and Culture in Museums

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College of Communications and the Arts, Seton Hall University

ARMS 8000: Master's Thesis

Spring 2022

Professor Gregory Stevens

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College of Communications and the Arts
Museum Professions

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Ian T. Cherry has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the master's thesis for the Master's in Museum Professions during this Spring semester 2022

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Abstract

Museums and Indigenous communities have shared tensions resulting from the way Native Americans have been discussed and depicted by museums, institutions which in the past have displayed indigenous cultures and artifacts alongside extinct animals and outdated dioramas. Despite this, Indigenous cultures and museums share an emphasis on storytelling practices, both as a means of education as well as preservation. This study sought to examine the use of storytelling and narrative exhibition development in museum exhibitions focused on Native American art, history, and culture. Through the course of a qualitative comparative cross case study, three key themes were identified, being Indigenous-led development, multimedia storytelling, and an emphasis on people rather than things, which when implemented more holistically represented Indigenous subjects.

Keywords: Indigenous Culture, Museums, Storytelling, Native Americans, Narrative Theory, Museum exhibitions, Art, Multimedia Storytelling, Museums Studies

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	7
Introduction.....	7
Purpose of the study.....	11
Summary.....	12
Chapter 2.....	14
Introduction.....	14
Indigenous culture.....	15
Indigenous cultures and storytelling.....	15
Indigenous culture and museums.....	16
NAGPRA and museums.....	18
Museums and exhibitions.....	18
Exhibition approaches in museums.....	20
Digital approaches in museums.....	22
Storytelling.....	25
Storytelling as an educational tool.....	26
Narrative Theory.....	27
Narrative Theory in museums.....	29
Summary.....	30
Chapter 3.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Methodology.....	32
Data collection.....	35
Case #1: The U'mista Cultural Centre, British Columbia.....	35
Case #2: The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, Florida.....	37
Case #3: The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.....	38
Data analysis.....	39
Method limitations.....	40
Summary.....	40
Chapter 4.....	42
Introduction.....	42
Case Study Museum #1: The U'mista Centre, Canada.....	43
Exhibition: <i>Living Tradition</i>	44
Indigenous-led Development.....	48
Multimedia Storytelling.....	48
Emphasis on People, Not Things.....	48
Case Study Museum #2: The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, USA.....	49
Exhibition: <i>It's Not a Costume</i>	49
Indigenous-led Development.....	53
Multimedia Storytelling.....	53

Emphasis on People, Not Things.....	53
Case Study Museum #3: The National Museum of the American Indian, USA.....	54
Exhibition: <i>Circle of Dance</i>	54
Indigenous-led Development.....	58
Multimedia Storytelling.....	59
Emphasis on People, Not Things.....	59
Comparative analysis.....	60
Indigenous-led Development.....	60
Multimedia Storytelling.....	61
Emphasis on People, Not Things.....	62
Summary.....	64
Chapter 5.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Thesis overview.....	66
Discussion.....	67
Indigenous-led Development.....	68
Multimedia Storytelling.....	69
Emphasis on People, Not Things.....	70
Recommendations.....	71
Strengths and limitations of the study.....	73
Suggestions for further research.....	73
Conclusion.....	74
References.....	75

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Native American representation in museums is a complicated issue, with tension between Indigenous peoples and museums due to America's colonial past as well as a history of miscommunication between Indigenous cultures and Western societies (Archambault, 1993; Archambault, 2011; Bedford, 2001). Historically, museums have represented Native Americans clinically, in the scientific fashion of the time by displaying Indigenous remains as anthropological specimens. In addition, Indigenous artifacts were far removed from their original contexts, which reinforced old stereotypes and ideologies about Native American (Archambault, 1993; Archambault, 2011). Objects and remains were taken from their original contexts, ancestors and spirits removed from their homes and placed in museums (Gulliford, 1996). This treatment displays the cultural patrimony of Native Americans to Western society but does not effectively convey the nature and identity of Native American peoples.

There have been efforts by both museums and Native Americans to resolve the past issues between the two groups. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 introduced legislation to protect Indigenous grave sites and legal avenues to seek the return of lost cultural patrimony. Kinzer (2000) explains that NAGPRA applies to every museum and federal agency with Native American human remains and related funerary artifacts. In addition, the law also covers sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony (Kinzer, 2000). The law requires that museums and government agencies inventory their holdings and identify Indigenous artifacts by their tribal origins. The institutions must then notify existing tribes of such objects that originate from their tradition (Kinzer, 2000). Both Native tribes and museums

had concerns about NAGPRA before the law was implemented, but in the years since the Act went into effect many groups feel that the law has fostered better understanding between tribes and the museum field (Kinzer, 2000). The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), which opened in 2004 as a part of the Smithsonian Institution, was an important bridge between Native peoples and museums, though not one without its share of issues (Lee, 2020). After NMAI's opening many Native Americans were left disappointed with the museum's permanent exhibitions, some of which have been condemned by critics – including some prominent Indigenous scholars – as inaccurate or not yet strict enough in the correcting of history (Ruffins, 2010). In a 2006 article entitled “Missed Opportunities: Reflections on National Museum of the American Indian,” Dr. Amy Lonetree argued that NMAI's exhibits attempted to convey Native American history without addressing the deliberate and accidental genocides against Native Americans over the last 500 years (Ruffins, 2010).

The recent opening of the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City has been another step for museums and Native Americans as an institution run by and for Native people. Chad Scott (2021) writes for *Forbes* of the museum's opening that the First Americans Museum allows Native Americans to tell their stories without the influence of non-native curators, board members, or directors for the first time. A Native-run museum is place where Native Americans can tell their own stories, in their own voice. In the modern museum field, Indigenous curators, collections managers, and educators are responsible for the maintenance of standards of care as well as the preservation of relationships with colleagues, institutions, and communities – not only the living, but also the ancestral (University of Chicago, 2020).

Resolving the long conflicts between Native Americans and museums is a process, however, and not one that can be addressed rapidly (Bedford, 2001; Chan, 2021). Despite the

fairly recent addition of NMAI to the Smithsonian Institution, Native Americans still remember the massive collection of Indigenous remains previously held by the Smithsonian (Lee, 2020). In 1988, the American Association of Museums reported to the federal government that 163 institutions held 43,306 sets of Native American skeletal remains (Gulliford, 1996). According to the *Washington City Paper*, as of last year 6,219 remains of Indigenous people from the collections of the National Museum of Natural History have been repatriated or made available for repatriation, with more eligible remains being identified every year (Randall, 2020).

Many Native Americans feel that museums, especially natural history museums, are unsettling (Chan, 2021; Rand et al., 2020). Museums often tell stories to their audiences, but in the case of Native American subjects, stories are told about or for Indigenous people rather than by them (Chan, 2021). In a podcast panel interview on Indigenous history and the way it is viewed by Western society, Paul Rand describes the experience of, “Walking into a natural history museum and seeing your people, and your culture displayed behind a glass case. Displayed in ways that your people had no input in” (Rand et al., 2020). This anecdote represents an experience that many Native Americans share (Chan, 2021; Rand et al., 2020). In the same interview, Nina Sanders argues, “When we go to school, when we’re in elementary school, you never see anything in history books about Indigenous people as they see themselves, or their own experiences” (Rand et al., 2020). Native American history has historically not included the personal experiences of Native Americans, rather relying on the biased accounts of Western historical figures (Chan, 2021). These experiences are not isolated. Many Native Americans grow up forcibly disconnected from their history, with their stories told by outsiders (Chan, 2021).

Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, a curator at NMAI and a Pequot tribeswoman, describes three reasons for Native Americans' distrust of museums. First, Native American history and culture is consistently exhibited not with the ancient arts of Greece and Rome, but in natural history museums along with "primitive" peoples, animals, and extinct specimens (Ruffins, 2010). Further, museum exhibitions tend to perpetuate the mistaken idea that Native Americans have died out, a falsehood that makes life for the 2.4 million Native Americans living in the U.S. harder (Ruffins, 2010). Finally, many institutions used violence or theft to collect the patrimony of Native Americans, making them difficult to trust today (Ruffins, 2010).

The conflicts between Western museums and Native American tribes are often predicated by major differences in cultural norms, such as traditions, mannerisms, and beliefs. One of the ways that Native culture expresses its traditions is through storytelling, which represents a method by which museum exhibitions may be able to present and educate on Native American history and culture (Bedford, 2001). While almost all cultures partake in storytelling as cultural practice, for Indigenous cultures storytelling is the means by which culture and history are preserved and maintained for future generations (Bedford, 2001; Chan, 2021). Today, many Native Americans utilize storytelling to reclaim what they feel was taken from them (Chan, 2021). Native Americans have been disconnected from their traditions and cultures for many years, and for many Indigenous people, stories and storytelling are all that remains. As Adrienne Chan states, "Storytelling is a process of reclaiming the story, to own the story, rather than be defined or storied by others" (Chan, 2021, p171).

Storytelling is also intrinsic to the museum experience. While the specific focus on storytelling's communicative functions in museums is recent, museums have always communicated with their audiences through storytelling processes (Bedford, 2001). Storytelling

is an effective educational tool, something that comes naturally to humans. Humans developed storytelling as a method to preserve important things beyond an individual's lifespan (Bedford, 2001). Stories also deal in what is truth, as well as what is seen to be true (Bedford, 2001). In other words, stories inform the listener of what the storyteller, or the culture the story comes from, believes to be true. Museums have an authority over truth, which they must be cautious of to avoid reinforcing stereotypes. Museums use storytelling to teach their audiences, and museums can use storytelling to work towards bringing together museums and Native Americans to resolve tensions between them.

Purpose of the study

This study was conducted to analyze the use of narrative theory and storytelling practices in museum exhibitions centered around Native American art, history, and culture. *Narrative Theory* is a communication theory that begins with the assumption that narrative is a basic tool that humans use to come to terms with the factors in their lives, such as change or time (Phelan et al., 2012). It was made clear through the examination of the literature that there is a divide between Native American communities and the museum field that for the sake of equity and diversity in museum spaces must be addressed. At the heart of this problem is the representation of Indigenous communities, wherein the conflict between the way their history is told and the way they share their own stories is of great importance. To address the conflict between Native Americans and museums, this study seeks to identify the techniques and practices that allow museums to help Indigenous people share their own histories, cultures, and arts. Museums still serve as a platform to share these stories, but by acknowledging Indigenous voices rather than speaking for Native communities.

Summary

This chapter began with a statement of the problem that this thesis seeks to address. The difficulties between Native Americans and museums are explained, including the reasons that many Native Americans display distrust or discomfort with museums. These reasons include controversies surrounding museum exhibitions and human remains within collections. Steps toward reconciliation, such as the founding of NMAI or the First Americans Museums or the passage of NAGPRA. This chapter has also discussed briefly the role of storytelling in both museums and Native American cultures. Finally, the purpose of the study and the structure of the remainder of the thesis were explained.

An understanding of both Native American culture and storytelling is paramount to the implementation of this study, so research into the literature related to both subjects was conducted and compiled within Chapter 2 of this thesis. This review of the literature found that storytelling has myriad uses in both formal and informal education, with the implication that the implementation of these techniques may be effective in representing Native American subjects in the museum setting.

Having completed a review of the literature as examined in Chapter 2, a lack of research addressing the use of storytelling for the purpose of exhibition development was identified in the realm of Native American centered museums and exhibitions. This project seeks to expand the literature of the field by contributing focused research. In order to do so, the following research question was developed:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

The literature guiding this research question will be introduced and examined in detail in Chapter 2, entitled “Literature Review”. In Chapter 3, the research methodology that this thesis utilizes will be explained with relevant definition of terms. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and an analysis of the gathered data. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the author’s recommendations based on the findings of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Storytelling is an effective tool in educational settings, such as museums, and the utilization of Narrative Theory allows for museums to act as storytellers while teaching audiences (Bedford, 2001; Stogner, 2017). According to many experts, Native American art, history, and culture have long been mishandled by museums (Bedford, 2001; Chan, 2021; Rangel, 2012). However, the use of storytelling in museum exhibitions may facilitate communication between the museum field and Indigenous culture. This thesis aims to examine the relationship between storytelling as a tool in informal education and the representation of Native Americans in museum exhibitions. To address this relationship the following research question was developed:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

The research conducted analyzes peer reviewed sources, with approximately 75% of the gathered sources from academic and professional journals relating to the fields of museum studies, sociology, narratology, and history. About 23% of the sources were from subject-matter books and essays found in collected works. One source was located from the United States government's statutes. Works were selected from the 1970s to today, though works from the last 15 years were prioritized and made up the majority of the examined sources. The research is being conducted to determine if a gap exists in the research related to the research question. Thus, this literature review examines the themes of Indigenous culture, museum exhibitions, storytelling, and Narrative Theory.

Indigenous Culture

For the purposes of this research, Native Americans will be defined as the Indigenous peoples of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The term *Native American* encompasses more than 500 federally recognized groups in the US alone, and while many of these groups share histories and cultural elements, they remain distinct and sovereign nations with their own identities. Wherever possible, specific terminology and naming conventions will be used to refer to these peoples in the research. These peoples have historically faced marginalization and discrimination on the basis of race and religion, and many Native Americans today still feel the effects of past harm (Deloria, 2018; Chan, 2021).

Indigenous cultures and storytelling

Storytelling and narrative are important to all peoples anthropologically, but certain groups have retained a focus and reverence for story that epitomizes entire cultures. Native Americans are one such group, and their cultural identity is tied deeply to the stories that Native societies pass down from generation to generation. Judy Iseke (2013) argues that Storytelling is a practice of Indigenous cultures that validates identity and sustains communities. Even today, with many Indigenous traditions falling out of practice, storytelling remains an integral part of a Native American identity (Fuller & Fabricius, 1992). For the last few centuries, colonization and colonizers have controlled the stories of Indigenous peoples, shaping and telling them in ways that were often at odds with the ways Native people saw themselves (Chan, 2021). Adrienne Chan (2021) asserts, “Storytelling is a process of reclaiming the story, to own the story, rather than be defined or storied by others.”

Storytelling, for Native Americans, follows a general pattern that most myths adhere to. Annabelle Nelson (2009) describes stories as circular, where they act as metaphor with an

introduction or education followed by a resolution that represents a return to a place and time where the next story can begin. This circular pattern reflects the very mechanisms of the natural order, such as the earth, the seasons, and the cosmos (Nelson, 2009). These stories often begin with the phrase, “many moons ago” in the same fashion as “once upon a time” for stories of European origin. Stories are cyclical, and by virtue of the cycle, they occur again and again. These stories contain important insights to the lives of the people who tell them, but there are several barriers to museums acting as storytellers for Native Americans.

Indigenous cultures and museums

Native Americans have a difficult history with museums. Museum collections have in the past treated Native American objects and remains as anthropological or ethnographic specimens, displayed in a fashion that removed the objects from traditional contexts and reinforced the notion that Indigenous peoples were inferior (Archambault, 1993; Archambault, 2011). Remains were often taken from grave sites without consent and displayed in a manner that implies to the museum visitor that these were the remnants of an ancient past, long dead, rather than a vibrant, living culture. Deloria (2018) argues that museums have long offered simplistic representations of Native Americans while simultaneously serving as repositories for Indigenous remains and the cultural patrimony of Indigenous cultures.

For most of the 20th century, Native Americans were shown by museums and other such institutions to be primitive peoples in historical opposition to cowboys or the military (Simpson, 1991). The image of the “Red Indian” was that of an Indigenous caricature, wearing composite outfits, perhaps a Plains Indian war bonnet and Southeastern style buckskin pants (Simpson, 1991).

Native arts also face this sort of representation by museums. Native art and culture, when displayed by museums, is presented and consumed through the lens of the dominant culture, depicting an imaginary past wherein Indigenous people are static and unchanging parts of colonial history and conquest (Rangel, 2012). Indigenous art is fetishized and commoditized, seen by American society as exotic or spiritual, and treated as simple crafts that might be purchased in a gift shop rather than examined or discussed as works of art. In the past Native American artists were seldom represented in galleries or museums (Ash-Milby & Phillips, 2017).

Native Americans and their cultures when present in museums are often treated as natural science specimens, displayed in dioramas with flora and fauna. Derek Bousé (1996) notes that Indigenous people are relegated to a status similar to that of wild animals by exhibits that put both on display together, seemingly for the viewing pleasure of white Americans. This sort of display practice presents Native Americans as specimens standing side-by-side with taxidermy replicas of extinct animals, implying that nature and Native culture are one and the same, and in the past.

Another reason for Native Americans' instinctive discomfort with the museum as an institution is the issue of human remains (Floyd, 1985; Gulliford, 1996). In 1988, the American Association of Museums reported to the federal government that 163 institutions held 43,306 sets of Native American skeletal remains (Gulliford, 1996). The Smithsonian Institution alone had acquired over its history more than 18,000 sets of remains (Gulliford, 1996). While many of these remains have been returned to their tribes, many more have not yet been repatriated.

In the last few decades, there has been a concerted effort by the museum field to address these issues of representation, but the process is a slow one (Archambault, 2011). Efforts from

individual institutions and laws passed by governments are aiding in the resolving of these problems.

NAGPRA and museums. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is one of the factors that has resulted in greater cooperation and communication between Native American peoples and the museum field. NAGPRA requires that institutions that receive federal funding return remains and ritual objects obtained from grave sites to lineal descendants or culturally affiliated tribes (United States, 2009). Some tribes desire to reintern Indigenous remains, while other tribes are accepting of museums housing excavated remains but desire intact sites to remain untouched (Hill, 1979; Raines, 1992; Gulliford, 1996). Others still desire to claim any and all remains unearthed on public land.

Repatriation is still a contentious issue from the museum perspective. Candice Floyd (1985), writing around the time when NAGPRA was being considered, asserts that the word “repatriation” strikes fear into the hearts of museum professionals. Curators imagine devastated collections, public relations specialists envision angry reporters calling for answers to hard questions, researchers fret about artifacts being snatched out from beneath them, and directors conjure the image of unending lawsuits and damaged reputations (Floyd, 1985). Many Native Americans, on the other hand, feel as though NAGPRA and other actions like it do not go far enough, and instead call for full repatriation efforts (Orona & Esquivido, 2020).

Museum Exhibitions

Museum exhibitions make extensive use of the principles of storytelling and narrative, as exhibitions are inherently designed to tell some sort of story. Museums essentially desire visitors to participate in their stories, whether discussing about interpretation or visitor interaction (Nielsen, 2017). The difference between storytelling and narrative, is that *storytelling* is the

communicative process whereas *narrative* is what is being shared between the storyteller, or narrator, and the audience. This implies oral communication, but other means of transference of information can also meet these criteria. Lwin (2017) argues that oral narrative is fundamentally closer to storytelling than written narrative due to the situation and context negotiated by the storyteller and the audience. Both oral narrative and written narrative have storytelling applications, however, the important distinction between storytelling and narrative stems from the communicative relationship between the sender and the receiver (Nelson, 2009).

Narrativity can be defined as the properties that characterize narratives and distinguish them from non-narrative communication (Lwin, 2017). This means that narrativity is related to the series of factors that reflect an interpretive framework that storytellers and recipients can use to judge a text as more or less narrative (Lwin, 2017). Lwin states that the focus is on the single narrative and differing narrative texts can be utilized to constitute different varieties or different degrees of narrativity (Lwin, 2017).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, early museums began as collections of exotic objects gathered by rich patrons, oftentimes princes and other nobles, as demonstrations of wealth and prestige (Lu, 2017). These princely collections – which became known in many instances as *cabinets of curiosities* – were often cared for by curators, who began to utilize early cataloguing and categorization techniques to display artifacts. These demonstrations and exhibitions were influenced by the Enlightenment belief that people were bettered simply by being in the presence of beautiful things. In the 18th century, the first public museums began to open as displays of artifacts to entertain and educate the public (Lumly, 1988). This ideal sparked a tradition of Western societies constructing grand museums designed for the edification of the public over the course of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries (Lumly, 1988; Weil, 1999). A spirit of egalitarian

education began to take root as the primary mission of museums and museum exhibitions spurred on by academics and philosophers such as and John Dewey and John Cotton Dana. In the post-WWII era, a conviction began to develop in those that work within the field of museums, the conviction that the museum exists to serve the public (Weil, 1999).

Museums also began to take shape as an artificial memory, or a sort of cultural archive (Lu, 2017). Museums gained a role as preservers of history and its artifacts, a role often thought to be the primary purpose of the museum's continued existence. Gathering and creating an archive for artifacts helps to ensure that physical objects can be saved from destruction by means of conservation (Lu, 2017). Ultimately, museums are responsible for the care of historically and culturally significant artifacts, but only insofar as those objects may be used to preserve the past or knowledge that deserves to be protected (Dana, 1999). Museum exhibitions, then, are the means by which institutions can tell the stories contained within the histories they protect (Bedford, 2001; Dana, 1999). Museums take the role of storyteller when presenting narratives to their audiences. Museums can build their narratives in several ways.

Exhibition approaches in museums

One of the ways exhibitions are considered is a *story-based approach*. In this framework, the guiding narrative of the display is fundamental to the exhibition design (Baker et al., 2016). This strategy utilizes fully the principles of Narrative Theory to construct an exhibition that acts as the story being told by the museum to the audience. As previously mentioned, *Narrative Theory* describes the assumption that narrative is a basic tool that humans use to come to terms with the factors in their lives, like change or time (Phelan et al., 2012). This approach focuses on the object second and is often used in cases where a museum desires to create an exhibition but does not have a wealth of related objects to choose from (Baker et al., 2016). The objects need to

be located that effectively communicate the story the museum intended to tell, with consideration to how each object fits within the tale, both as a whole and in relation to each other (Baker et al., 2016; Phelan et al., 2012).

Exhibitions may also be examined from the framework of a *concept-based approach*. In this approach, like the former method, objects are secondary in the design of the exhibition (Baker et al., 2016). A theme is selected, and the exhibition is built around the idea. This method is less deeply connected to narrative, but ultimately all exhibitions represent a story being told. A concept-based exhibition cannot rely on the strength of a set narrative or the intrinsic stories of objects but must instead weave together a coherent story from disparate, but thematically related things. The theme of a concept-centered exhibition must be clear, or at least justifiable, in all of the objects selected to be shown. Without these connections, there is no story being told, merely a collection of objects on display (Cameron, 1971; Baker et al., 2016).

Object-based approaches, by contrast, are the most common form of museum exhibition. They make use of the objects already within a museum collection and build narratives out of related artifacts. It relies on building those narratives out of the historical, biographical and cultural significance of the objects (Pearce, 1990; Baker et al., 2016). It can be said that collecting is an intrinsic human behavior, and it is this behavior from which museums began (Cameron, 1971). This instinct is also the source from which the object-centered approach to exhibitions develops. Object-based exhibitions demonstrate to the audience the interests of the collector, the way they viewed the world, and the things they felt were important, even if the exhibition does not overtly focus on those subjects. Until fairly recently, collections were private, and public museums did not exist in any recognizable manner (Cameron, 1971). Most modern museums began from these kinds of collections, and so building an object-based exhibition is not

only telling the stories of the objects, but also the story of the person or persons who collected them. In this too, the museum tells a story.

Another such method, commonly seen in historic house museums, is to bring to life the objects and often the location where the history occurred, utilizing the museum as a whole. A biographical museum dedicated to one person can be read as a narrative that uses physical evidence to represent the lived experiences of its subject (Booth, 2014). Alison Booth argues that a house museum exhibits basic elements of prose narrative, such as exposition, setting, place, and time (Booth, 2014). The house museum, being a building with collected objects acts as the material medium of the narrative's characterization. Time, which is also essential to a story, is deeply inscribed in a memorial house museum, focused on the history of the building, the lives of its inhabitants, and the provenance of the artifacts within (Booth, 2014). Even museums that are not dedicated to a specific person or event can be made to represent for the audience the nature and presence of the setting of the story. These sorts of museums become exhibitions almost in their entirety and lead the audience through time and space to experience the story in a dialogue with the individual and the institution (Bedford, 2001; Booth, 2014).

Digital approaches in museums

In addition to many museums moving towards the use of more narrative in their exhibitions, the nature of storytelling in museums has changed greatly in the past few years due to the rise of technology and social media. According to Stogner (2017), digital media technologies and increasingly universal Internet use are changing how people communicate culture, in ways that are dramatically impacting the museum experience. Wyman et al. discuss this in their article on the subject of digital media in museums, arguing that the introduction of digital media to the work of museums allows them to reach audiences that may not be available

otherwise, and furthermore to converse with those audiences (Wyman et al., 2011). They argue that what was once primarily an authoritative voice speaking to the public through exhibitions and publications has changed, in many places, into a multi-faceted experience that invites visitor interaction and conversation (Wyman et al., 2011). The dialogue between museums and their audiences, whether digital or analog, is an important part of the storytelling process. This communication seems far more effective with the use of narrative; on platforms where untold amounts of information are available, the story being told is what draws audiences to the museum.

The move towards the digital or virtual, in many museums, has resulted in a misconception that museums no longer need to be physical to connect with an audience and could simply be replaced with virtual facsimiles (Giaccardi, 2006). As previously discussed, the museum is not only a repository for objects, and museum artifacts do not inherently radiate history or knowledge to a viewer. Rather, the museum is a storyteller, a narrator which interprets the meaning that the object may represent. The use of digital technologies can facilitate the institution's storytelling and deliver it to a broader audience by aiding in more personal explorations of museum contents (Giaccardi, 2006; Stogner, 2017).

There has also been a marked interest by both academics and the public in *transmedia storytelling* in the past few years. Transmedia storytelling is the practice of presenting narrative through multiple media and by more than one method. Stories are now told and expanded through different platforms and media, such as books, movies, TV show, blogs, web articles, comics, fan art, and many more. Jim Collins (2013) describes the rise of transmedia narrativity with relation to the narrative universes, stating that in the early twenty-first century, there has been a shift in the benefits of narrative and the knowledge needed to maximize those benefits.

Books, movies, and TV programs still fascinate, but now they have an additional function; they exist to be made use of, to be extended and taken up by amateurs and professionals alike as exercises in narrative and world building. This increase in transmedia narrativity may be relatively new to conglomerate-based cultural production, but the practices have been utilized in museums for ages. Transmedia storytelling, while not a term that museums currently use, has been the means by which museums have communicated their stories for decades (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018). Museums that make use of multiple forms of media to communicate with their audiences and the use of the specific narrative characteristics of those media can easily be considered transmedia institutions (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018; Wyman et al., 2011). Such media can include the objects on display; wall and label texts, videos and movies shown in galleries, pictures, exhibition catalogs, and guided tours. In other words, many museums are transmedia museums, though they do not refer to themselves in that way (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018).

With social media available to nearly everyone at all times, museum storytelling comes into contact with audiences now more than ever. A visitor can often simply pull out their phone and take pictures or record a video and upload them to the social media of their choosing within seconds. While many museums still have rules against photography, many museums are relaxing these restrictions to better cater to their audiences (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020). Social media posts, while permanent as all things on the internet are, are also in a strange way ephemeral and fleeting. On some platforms, such as Instagram Stories or Snapchat, posts are only visible for twenty-four hours before they disappear. The ability to share what a visitor sees, even if temporarily, has changed the nature of museum storytelling. Before social media, storytelling within the museum progressed from the museum as the source of the narrative to the

visitor as the recipient, mostly in a single direction with the flow of information firmly defined (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020). Now, however, not only can the visitor often communicate back with the museum about the narrative and their experience, but they can also pass the story along, becoming storytellers themselves and sharing their experiences with audiences far beyond the museum's visitors (Wyman et al., 2011; Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020).

Storytelling

All cultures, at one time or another, placed great value on the lessons that can be shared through the telling of stories (Bedford, 2001; Stogner, 2017). Stories can range from the fantastical to the practical, from silly to serious, but they all demonstrate the storyteller's desire to share something that is worth telling their listeners. Humans are natural storytellers and have always made sense of the world through the use of narrative (Bedford, 2001). The communication of culture through stories is ancient, and can be seen from cave drawings to books, pictures, and films (Stogner, 2017). In the oral tradition, stories began around campfires and persist today in video and audio recordings (Stogner, 2017). Hampton and DeMartini argue that stories possess a power of *meaning-making*, that they shape how people engage with and make sense of their lives (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017). The stories people are told and the stories they choose to tell both frame and reflect understandings of themselves, of the world that surrounds them, and their places in it (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017). This meaning-making is innately familiar to the human species, something people the world over are raised with and shaped by from the earliest days of youth.

Reese (2003) and Ryan (2008) both argue that the most impactful stories, the stories that people connect with, are the ones that challenge the listener, the ones that allow for the recipient of the stories to grow and learn. One example of this can be seen in the stories of the Bible or

Quran have persisted through the years, stories which continue to challenge their audiences whether or not their content is meant to be believed. The nature of storytelling, or perhaps the nature of human beings, makes storytelling effective as an educational tool (Bedford, 2001; Ryan, 2008).

Storytelling as an educational tool

Storytelling has two features that make it effective as a communicative tool, especially in the realm of informal learning like the environments that museums offer. The first is that humans have developed to utilize narrative to preserve information beyond a person's natural lifespan (Bedford, 2001; Ryan, 2008). Children are raised to construct and analyze stories as a means to integrate their needs and desires within the family structure (Bedford, 2001). The second factor is that stories, regardless of their origin, have a point of view (Ryan, 2008). Stories can deal in the *canon*, the accepted behaviors that societies are taught to believe, or the *exceptional*, that which violates the canon (Bedford, 2001). Stories take a moral stance, even if that moral stance is to be against moral stances, and through the resolution of a story the listener can sort out their thoughts and beliefs about a given subject (Bedford, 2001; Ryan, 2008).

The lessons a story shares are generally important to the people telling the story, otherwise the story is unlikely to be told (Ryan, 2008). American folktales about John Henry, a mythical African American railroad worker, teach that hard work and sheer determination will win out against seemingly insurmountable odds. Many Native Americans of the Puebloan peoples tell the story of Coyote and the White Buffalo, a myth that teaches the importance of being grateful of gifts given and careful of greed. These types of stories possess a staying power that has preserved them for decades, centuries, and in some cases millennia (Chan, 2021; Nelson, 2009).

In the realms of language studies and the social sciences, the power of a story has long been used as a tool to support learning (Engel et al., 2018). While less common in other fields, storytelling is still capable of teaching complex concepts to learners effectively in nearly all subjects (Nelson, 2009; Stogner, 2017). This understanding of storytelling for the purposes of education is the basis of Narrative Theory. This theory is the subject of the following section of this literature review.

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory proposes that a person's background – their social, political, and personal experiences – affect what stories a person reads or listens to and affects how that individual makes sense of the stories they consume (Reese, 2003). Phelan et al. (2012) in their book, *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, define the narrative loosely, stating that narrative is someone telling somebody else that something happened; this is done on some occasion and for some purpose, but ultimately the telling and the setting are what is important. Jane Nielsen (2017) defines narrative as effectively a structure that can be based on some form of engagement, such as emotional, educational, individual or social, fictive or non-fictive, or subjective or objective. In addition, Phelan et al. (2012) argue that narrative is not only important for its thematic elements but also the experience of the narrative, what might be called the storytelling aspect of narrative. Similarly, Rigney (2010) argues that narrative cannot be used to neatly explain immutable categories, but rather is a heuristic tool that assists in making sense of the world and in generating new intersubjective insights.

With this understanding of narrative, the act of telling the story can be more important than the contents of the story itself (Rigney, 2010; Ryan, 2008) This reaffirms the idea that storytelling is a communicative act, as the narrator and the audience have an equal importance in

the experience of a story being told (Nielsen, 2017; Ryan, 2008). Without the audience, the narrator has no reason to tell the story, and without the narrator there is no story to be told (Ryan, 2008). This can be made even more complicated by the nature of the narrative in question. Fictional narratives and stories often have a distinct separation between the narrator and the author of the tale, and both are telling the story for different reasons (Phelan et al., 2012; Ryan, 2008). The example Phelan et al. use to demonstrate this is the novel *Huckleberry Finn*, wherein shortly after the story's events Huck is telling the tale to the audience for his own purposes. Mark Twain, at a much later moment historically, is utilizing the story, and Huck's place in it, to communicate to his audience his purpose (Phelan et al., 2012). Furthermore, the reader of the novel is drawn to the story at yet another time and place in history and is able to understand the narrative through their own point of view.

Nonfiction tends towards fewer communicative levels of framing but such framing still has a place as a narrative device. *Framing* is a narrative device that sets a story within an established context (Haring, 2004). In fiction, stories most often begin with "once upon a time" or "in the beginning" Every culture has its traditional openings to a story. In nonfiction, the frame of a story exists within the relationship of the narrator to the story (Phelan et al., 2012). A narrator of nonfiction may utilize the events they have experienced to communicate a concept, but they have an equal power to distance themselves from the story as well (Phelan et al., 2012; Ryan, 2008). Ultimately, the only requirement for narrative, fiction or otherwise, is that someone is telling someone else something (Phelan et al., 2012). The general nature of the definition of narrative allows for broad application, as seen in literature from across the world wherein every subject imaginable can be discussed within a narrative framework.

Narrative theory in museums

Narrative theory has broad applications in the museum field, and in the last few decades there has been a marked rise in the rate at which narrative and storytelling are used to communicate ideas within the museum space, especially within the frame of exhibitions.

DiBlasio and DiBlasio (1983) describe seven principles of museum storytelling, which are:

- 1) An effective museum story balances entertainment and factual soundness.
- 2) An effective museum story is compact.
- 3) An effective museum story is concrete, employing highly visual language.
- 4) An effective museum story is personally appealing.
- 5) An effective museum story not only describes artifacts but tells how some of them are made.
- 6) An effective museum story dislodges mistaken stereotypes.
- 7) An effective museum story invites cross-cultural comparisons.

These elements are at the center of a museum's use of Narrative Theory. A museum's stories must be entertaining, but also factual. DiBlasio and DiBlasio (1983) argue that audiences do not pay attention to poor or boring descriptions, but nothing is accomplished by presenting incorrect information. Museum stories must be clear and concise, as well as concrete. The use of highly visual language more effectively reaches wide audiences (DiBlasio & DiBlasio, 1983). Effective stories also tend to be appealing to the audience personally, as discussed in the previous section on storytelling. A museum must do more than display objects, museums must also inform audiences on how those objects are made and why they matter in the historical canon (Bedford, 2001; DiBlasio & DiBlasio, 1983). As physical representations of the stories being told, objects have weight. DiBlasio and DiBlasio (1983) and Stogner (2017) argue that effective museum

stories should combat mistaken or malicious stereotypes as well. Finally, effective museum stories invite discourse. How effectively a museum adheres to these principles determines how well they act as storytellers (DiBlasio & DiBlasio, 1983).

History museums have a clear connection to Narrative Theory, as history is a form of storytelling (Bedford, 2001). However, other kinds of museums can also make effective use of storytelling as an educational tool, especially in the digital age. Science museums such as the Field Museum in Chicago are utilizing narrative in informal education settings to teach science to youth audiences (Engel et al., 2018). Engel et al. argue that the intrinsic nature of learning by way of narrative makes it an ideal approach to effectively developing an understanding of science in early learners (Engel et al., 2018). While traditional science education could be reduced to individual facts or a timeline of discoveries, a narrative approach allows for the true excitement of curiosity to be the focus, engaging children's own interests and curiosity in the process (Engel et al., 2018). This approach also has applications for museums of art as well, where the objects on display are often made more impactful through the contextualization of the work and its creator (Bedford, 2001).

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction that explained the points that this literature review was implemented to examine. This literature review was conducted in order to answer the following research question:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

The review of the literature analyzed Indigenous culture, as well as its relation to storytelling and museums. Within this section, NAGPRA was discussed for its connection to

both Native American communities and the museum field. Next, museum exhibitions were defined, with an explanation of the history of exhibitions as well as examinations of exhibition approaches and digital approaches. The review continued with a section on storytelling, including look at storytelling as an educational tool, followed by a section on Narrative Theory and its use in museums.

Having completed this review of the literature it is clear that there is a lack of research addressing the use of storytelling for the purpose of exhibition development with respect to Native American centered museums and exhibitions. This project seeks to expand the literature of the field by contributing focused research. In Chapter 3, entitled “Methods,” the research methodology that this thesis makes use of is defined, analyzed, and justified. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study, which includes the gathered data and an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 presents recommendations based on the findings structured after the conclusion of the research.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

As stated in previous chapters of this thesis, the history of museums has made cooperation between museums and Native American communities difficult. Museum exhibitions have the capacity to reach broad audiences, and tell the stories of people, both in the past and in the present. This thesis examines how the use of storytelling as a focus in museum exhibitions can effectively represent Native American art, history, and culture. This study aims to analyze the use of storytelling techniques and narrative theory as a means by which to address the representation of Native Americans and their culture in museum exhibitions. In order to address this, the following research question was crafted:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

In order to answer this research question, a multiple case study approach was selected for its ability to examine specific phenomena, boundedness, and focus on problem-solving within a contemporary context. The institutions selected for this multiple case study are the U'mista Cultural Centre, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), a Smithsonian Institution museum. These institutions will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Methodology

The case study took place between February and April 2022 and featured three sample institutions or exhibitions to serve as points of focus from which to collect data for the study. For each example, a qualitative textual analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, themes,

processes, and practices. Content analysis was also applied to the cases to identify strategies for the implementation of storytelling and narrative exhibition development in museums with relation to Native American subjects, as well as to examine the efficacy of such practices. This chapter details the methodology and rationale of the project, as well as the basis for data collection and analysis, and the limitations of the study.

A *case study* is defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as qualitative approach wherein the researcher examines and explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over a period of time by means of detailed and in-depth data collection from multiple sources. A *bounded system* is separated out and selected for research based on time, place, or physical boundaries (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Cases were selected based on how well each institution or exhibition adhered to the following criteria. First, cases were required to be institutions or exhibitions within the United States of America and Canada. Institutions and exhibitions in Mexico, a country also possessing Native American groups, were excluded from consideration based on vastly different cultural attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. Museums from other countries were also disregarded as being too broad for the scope of this research project in addition to lacking an endemic Native American population. Second, the cases were chosen based on focus, being related to or primarily about Native American art, history, and/or culture. This excluded institutions with a focus on other Indigenous groups such as Native Hawaiians or the Maya, as these groups do not share the same historical and cultural elements that this thesis is interested in. This criterion also excluded museums with different focuses. Finally, the cases all utilize storytelling practices and narrative exhibition development in their exhibitions and programs. Storytelling, being intrinsic to Indigenous culture as discussed in previous chapters, is a common factor between museums

and Native Americans and the focus of this research (Chan, 2021). In addition, case institutions were required to possess online digital exhibitions for the purposes of conducting the research. Taking these criteria into account, the three institutions selected are the U'mista Cultural Centre, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, and the NMAI.

As a study design, case study is more interested in the selected individual cases than the method of inquiry used (Hyett et al., 2014; Starman, 2013). Creswell and Poth (2018) also identified universal characteristics of case studies, specifically that they specify a particular case or cases to be studied and are bounded by certain parameters. They also feature procedures that are dependent on the nature of the study and allow for an in-depth understanding of the case, as well as providing appropriate data analysis for the sources utilized, describing the themes of the case, and ending with *assertions*, or general lessons that can be learned from the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hyett et al., 2014; Starman, 2013).

Case studies are typified by purpose and number of cases observed as *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, or *collective case studies* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Intrinsic case studies seek to understand a specific case rather than a general phenomenon. An instrumental case study on the other hand aims for a deeper understanding of an issue. A collective case study is similar to an instrumental study taken further by the addition of multiple cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Case studies are also either *problem solving*, where an issue is examined in as specific case and potential solutions are provided based on analysis, or *descriptive*, where cases analyze what happened and why (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The case study methodology was determined to be the most appropriate approach to address the research questions because it allows for in-depth analysis of several institutions or exhibitions simultaneously (Hyett et al., 2014). Case study research is used broadly in the

museum field, often as a means to study best practices in the field (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020; Wymen et al. 2011). Case studies make effective use of text and documents as a primary source, making the method less reliant of human subjects than other methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The case study for this project was judged based on these criteria to be a problem-solving collective case study as it gathers multiple cases for analysis in order to identify a solution for a problem. In other words, this project studied the three chosen institutions and analyzed an exhibition from each of them in order to address the guiding research question for this thesis.

Data collection

Data in this project consists of information and text gathered directly from the institutions and exhibitions selected as case studies, specifically from the museum's websites as well as from the analysis of the online exhibitions. According to Bogdan and Biklen, textual data exists in three types: *personal documents*, *official documents*, and *popular documents* (Bogdan & Biken, 2006, as cited by Creswell & Poth, 2018). Personal documents include emails, blogs, letters, individually produced websites, and other individual primary sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Official documents are texts such as organizational websites and reports, whereas popular documents are publicly available texts like magazines and photographs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This project utilized official documents primarily, as well as some popular documents in the form of brochures and exhibition catalogues and where possible, exhibition narratives from the relevant institutions. Data was gathered from the institutions directly via the museums' websites as well as analytical notation based upon the example exhibitions.

Case #1: The U'mista Cultural Centre, British Columbia

The U'mista Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia is a tribal museum dedicated to the Kwakwaka'wakw, a First Nations group in Canada that consists of 18 tribes of Kwak'waka-speaking peoples (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). These people settled the Pacific North Coast and despite various political, social, and economic changes the Kwakwaka'wakw have maintained many traditions and practices that tie them to their ancestors and to each other (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Chief among these is the Potlach, a traditional gathering of people for the purpose of sharing wealth with one another (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Potlaching includes song, dance, and oral storytelling elements as a way to pass their history on to the next generation (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*).

From 1884 to 1951, the Potlach was outlawed by the government of Canada, and over the 67 years that the practice was banned thousands of artifacts and objects were confiscated from the Kwakwaka'wakw in an effort to “civilize” the First Nations peoples, and people who performed Potlach were arrested and fined (U'mista Cultural Centre, *The History of the Potlatch Collection*). Despite this, many Natives still held Potlach ceremonies in secret. On one such occasion in 1921, 45 people were arrested for various crimes such as dancing, giving speeches, and receiving gifts (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The objects confiscated eventually made their way into the collections of the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, later the National Museum of Man and now the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*).

After the end of the formal Potlach ban, efforts began for the repatriation of the objects taken. Eventually the National Museum of Man agreed to return a portion of the stolen objects on the condition that a museum be constructed for their care and preservation (U'mista Cultural

Centre, *The History of the Potlatch Collection*). After careful consideration and planning, in 1974 the U'mista Cultural Society was incorporated and construction began on two museum facilities, the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay and Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre in Cape Mudge (U'mista Cultural Centre, *The History of the Potlatch Collection*).

The U'mista Cultural Centre's mission is an extension of the mission of the society that founded it, which reads, "The mandate of the U'mista Cultural Society is to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw" (U'mista Cultural Centre, *U'mista Cultural Society*). The museum does this by preserving the physical artifacts of the Kwak'waka-speaking peoples, especially the Potlatch Collection, and educating visitors on the culture and history of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Exhibitions like the one that was selected for this case study demonstrate the Centre's efforts towards this goal.

Case #2: The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, Florida

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is a tribal museum on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation near Clewiston, Florida that houses more than 180,000 artifacts and archival documents concerning the Seminole Tribe of Florida and its history (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Museum History*). The museum opened in 1997 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of federal recognition of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. In addition to the museum's vast collection, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki boasts a 66-acre cypress dome with a boardwalk as an ecological experience that educates visitors on the natural environment of the Everglades that the Seminole call home (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Museum History*).

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's mission is to "Celebrate, Preserve, and Interpret Seminole Culture and History," which they work towards by utilizing permanent exhibitions to educate visitors on Seminole history as well as temporary exhibitions and online exhibitions focused on

more specific subjects (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Our Mission*). The museum espouses diversity, trust, service, inspiration, relevance, and passion as core values that drive the museum and its efforts (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Our Mission*). In order to examine how the museum uses storytelling in its exhibition development approach, one online exhibition was examined as a case study of this museum's practices.

Case #3: The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is a part of the Smithsonian Institution, the largest museum complex in the world (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). As its name suggests, NMAI focuses on Native American and pre-Columbian art, history, and culture with an expansive collection of objects, art, photographs, and archives covering the Western Hemisphere from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). NMAI operates three facilities which include the museum on the National Mall in Washington D.C., the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC) located at the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House in New York City, and the Cultural Resources Center (CRC) in Suitland, Maryland (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*).

The museum was founded with the National Museum of the American Indian Act passed in 1989 when the extensive Heye Collection was merged with the Smithsonian's existing Native American collection (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). NMAI is singular among museums of its kind as it represents a pan-Native American museum whose head staff and board consist primarily of Native Americans of varying tribal affiliations (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). Seventeen separate Native American tribes are represented within the institutions Board of Directors (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). The museum's current director, Cynthia Chavez Lamar, is a museum professional with both curatorial and

management experience at NMAI as well as a member of the Pueblo of San Felipe (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*).

NMAI's mission reads, "In partnership with Native peoples and their allies, the National Museum of the American Indian fosters a richer shared human experience through a more informed understanding of Native peoples" (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). The institution fulfills its commitment to this mission by ensuring that it works with Native American groups, tribes, and nations on every level, and by ensuring Native people are represented both within its exhibits and within its staff and leadership.

Data analysis

Themes and codes identified through the review of the literature were compared and contrasted across the case studies. *Coding* is the process of taking data from research and categorizing it to facilitate study (Hyett et al., 2014). The first level of analysis was conducted through the reading of research, with note taking providing a second level of analysis. Elements in the cases were examined to identify what works with each institution's approach and what does not.

The data was initially examined based on the themes identified in the literature review of this thesis. These themes are "Indigenous culture," "museum exhibitions," "storytelling," and "Narrative Theory." These themes were pre-coded in advance, allowing for the discovery of key themes within the cases. The key themes identified are "Indigenous-led development," "multimedia storytelling," and an "emphasis on people rather than things." The researcher recorded the workflow and cognitive process, noting what topics were most memorable, what subjects seemed to be missing, and what the most important lessons were.

Method limitations

This project recognizes the limitations of the case study methodology, one of which is the difficulty in generalizing the results of a case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hyett et al., 2014). As a qualitative research method, findings are unavoidably the result of an individual researcher's interpretations, and therefore their biases (Hyett et al., 2014). Other researcher's attempting to replicate the research found here may find different themes and codes as more important, choosing to analyze the data in a different manner than was done here (Hyett et al., 2014).

In addition, there are difficulties present in comparing multiple cases. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) warn that seeking comparisons between more than one case may undermine their unique natures. By the subjective nature of textual and content analysis, the researchers must be cognizant of their biases with respect to the subjects being researched (Chan, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology that this thesis utilized in the course of research. The chapter began with an introduction which reiterated the research question created in the course of the literature review's completion. The methodology of multiple case study utilizing textual and content analysis was defined and explained. The method was stated to be a problem-solving collective case study. The standards of data collection, as well as the criteria for case selection were stated, followed by an explanation of the data analysis process with the inclusion of the initial themes for the purpose of coding. The next chapter, "Findings," discusses the results of the study, which include the gathered data and the analysis of the data based on the

methodologies explained in this chapter. Chapter 5 presents recommendations based on the findings of the research, that state the impact of this research and its applications.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

As examined previously in this thesis, the use of storytelling and narrative exhibition development may be beneficial in the representation of Native American history and culture in museum spaces. Several Native American-run museums utilize these techniques already, and an analysis of their practices can be conducted to ascertain whether these practices can be effectively implemented in other institutions. To examine this, the following research question was crafted:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

In order to answer this research questions, a multiple case study was conducted to address issues in the museum field of tensions between institutions and Native American groups and communities.

The research took place between February and April 2022, examining the three case study institutions. These institutions were the U'mista Cultural Centre, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, and National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). These museum exhibitions were analyzed for their connection to the themes discovered in the literature review of this thesis, namely Indigenous culture, museum exhibitions, storytelling, and narrative theory. Cases were selected based on the following criteria: first, the institution is located in the United States or Canada; second, the institution is focused on Native American subjects; third, the institution utilizes storytelling and narrative practices in exhibition and program development; and fourth, the institution possesses online exhibitions upon which research and analysis may be conducted.

For each institution, a qualitative textual analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, themes, processes, and practices. Content analysis was also utilized for the cases to identify strategies for the implementation of storytelling and narrative exhibition development in museums with relation to Native American subjects, with consideration to the efficacy of such practices. Over the course of this research, three key themes were identified within the practices used by the case study institutions, these being Indigenous-led development, multimedia storytelling practices, and an emphasis on people rather than things. These themes then formed the basis of a comparative analysis of each of the case studies and their storytelling practices.

This chapter details the findings of this research and the analysis of the institutions based on the newly identified themes.

Case Study Museum #1: The U'mista Centre, Canada

The U'mista Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia is a tribal museum dedicated to the Kwakwaka'wakw, a First Nations group in Canada that consists of 18 tribes of Kwak'waka-speaking peoples (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). These people settled the Pacific North Coast and despite various political, social, and economic changes the Kwakwaka'wakw have maintained many traditions and practices that tie them to their ancestors and to each other (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*).

In 1974 the U'mista Cultural Society was incorporated, and construction began on two museum facilities: the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay and Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre in Cape Mudge (U'mista Cultural Centre, *The History of the Potlatch Collection*). The U'mista Cultural Centre's mission reads, "The mandate of the U'mista Cultural Society is to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw" (U'mista Cultural Centre, *U'mista Cultural Society*). The museum does this by preserving the

physical artifacts of the Kwak'wala-speaking peoples, especially the Potlach Collection, and educating visitors on the culture and history of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Exhibitions like the one that was selected for this case study demonstrate the Centre's efforts towards this goal.

Exhibit: Living Tradition

Living Tradition: The Kwakwaka'wakw Potlach on the Northwest Coast is an online exhibition centered on the Potlach Collection at the U'mista Cultural Centre which emphasizes the traditional practices that these Kwakwaka-speaking peoples have upheld “since a time beyond memory” (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The exhibit describes how the songs and dances, and ceremonial objects of the people honor what sustains them physically and spiritually, maintaining their connection with the world around them (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). These represent the preservation of history, and of the stories that pass on the important ideals of their people with the understanding that the means by which these stories are told, such as song and dance, are methods by which the information they contain is better transferred to the next generation. Singing traditional songs and dancing ceremonial dances, as well as the creation of sacred objects are acts of storytelling served to help keep their ways alive through the years (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The exhibition also makes extensive use of photos, of historical figures and events as well as of objects. These work in tandem with the text to bring the stories to new audiences and a new generation.

The exhibition begins with an introduction to Kwak'wala-speaking peoples that defines and emphasizes the Kwakwaka'wakw people, their land, and their language. The first section, “Our People,” leads with a description of the rich cultural elements that their culture is built upon. There is a distinct focus on the self-definition of the Kwakwaka'wakw, a focus on the way these people see themselves and would describe it to others (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living*

Tradition). There is also an emphasis on song, dance, and story, all distinct storytelling media that confer meaning in the communicative relationship between the storyteller (the museum) and the audience (museum visitors). The Kwakwaka'wakw specifically describe themselves in reference to the natural world around them, which they see themselves as a part of rather than being distinct from (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). This particular belief is not uncommon to Native American and First Nations groups, but it is important to note that this is the way that this particular group of tribes choose to see themselves.

The following section of the exhibition, “Our Land,” the exhibition describes the elements of the natural world that sustain the tribe and the people, elements often reflected in their storytelling practices. Salmon and oolichan, endemic fish from the rivers, lakes, and oceans of the Northwest region serve to feed the people; cedar, a sacred tree, is transformed into tools, canoes, longhouses, and masks (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). These things, a meal, a home, they are an intrinsic part of any culture, but to the Kwakwaka'wakw they exist in both the natural and spirit worlds, ties that bind together the mundane and the divine. There is a distinct emphasis on the idea that there is wealth in the land, the forest, and the sea (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The final section of the exhibition’s introduction, “Our Language,” offers the visitor a brief glimpse into the Kwak’wala language, an endangered language shared by the tribes that comprise the Kwakwaka'wakw (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The exhibition shows off the Kwak’wala alphabet and in doing so reinforces the commonalities between the museum visitor and the tribe. It implies to the audience that they share commonalities with the Kwak’wala-speaking peoples.

The next part of the exhibition begins by translating the word Potlach, so that English speakers might better understand its importance. According to the exhibition, Potlach means “to

give,” which references the Kwakwaka'wakw belief that a wealthy and powerful person is someone who can give the most away (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). A potlach is an event to mark a significant event or occasion in the lives of Kwakwaka'wakw wherein visitors and guests are given gifts. The more gifts given, the higher the status achieved by the host of the potlach (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). This practice plays a critical role in the culture of Kwak'waka-speaking peoples, and it serves to unify people as well as preserve the people's traditions for future generations (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Potlaches are held for a number of reasons, including marriages, the naming of children, transference of ownership or stewardship rights, or mourning (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). At the potlach, dances are performed, masks are worn, and joy is expressed for the lives of the living as well as the honor of the departed.

The exhibition next addresses the potlach ban, with an emphasis on the damage that was done to Kwakwaka'wakw culture. Stories of the harm done to families, of loved ones arrested, of sacred objects lost are common among the people (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The potlach, and all of the ceremonial objects that go with it, are important to the Kwakwaka'wakw. The ban ultimately was an attack on their culture and on their people, an attempt by non-native people to remove from the First Nations peoples their history and traditions (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). When the ban was finally lifted, rather than formally being repealed, the law was simply deleted from the books, with no consideration to restitution and repatriation of the artifacts that had been stolen (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Even with the ban lifted, it took years for potlaching to become commonplace again (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The exhibition makes use of personal anecdotes and powerful imagery to drive home the impact of the ban on the Kwakwaka'wakw.

The exhibition text describes the origin of *U'mista*, a sort of spirit of returning, that is said to represent what was once lost being returned (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). This word is how the Kwakwaka'wakw chose to identify their society dedicated to the return of the lost masks and objects, as well as the name of the museum dedicated to the returned artifacts' care (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*).

The exhibit finishes with a virtual tour of the Potlach Gallery at the U'mista Cultural Centre, with high-resolution panoramic images of the gallery space, as well as thumbnail images of objects that can direct a visitor's attention to the object within the gallery space (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The carved and painted masks give life to the spirits and beings that the people revere, the characters of their stories. The objects are accompanied by videos of the dances the objects are a part of, demonstrated by skilled Indigenous performers (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The story of the potlach guides the visitor through the exhibition, teaching of the Kwakwaka'wakw and their culture.

The U'mista Cultural Centre's exhibition demonstrates a clear focus on the themes of museum exhibitions and Indigenous culture, but the themes of storytelling and narrative theory are also present in the practices the museum utilized to create the exhibit. The flow of the exhibit is guided by the story of the Kwakwaka'wakw and the history of their land and their traditions. A visitor to the exhibition is guided through an introduction of the Kwak'wala-speaking peoples and the land they live in. Then, like a story being recited at a campfire, the exhibition tells visitors of the importance of potlaching to their people and the history of loss the Kwakwaka'wakw experienced under the Potlach Ban. The exhibition concludes with a retelling of the return of the sacred objects taken by the government, and the construction of a museum to house the artifacts and educate visitors about their people and their culture. This approach

demonstrates a clear understanding of narrative theory as an educational tool to teach in the informal educational setting of the museum.

Indigenous-led Development

The theme of Indigenous-led development became apparent in this exhibition through research into the U'mista Cultural Centre and the history of the collection that the exhibition discusses. As a tribal museum, the U'mista Cultural Centre and its exhibitions are led by and focused on Indigenous people, and the Kwakwaka'wakw nations are deeply involved in the operation of the institution (U'mista Cultural Centre, *U'mista Cultural Society*). The Potlatch Collection itself exists within the museum only by the permission of the original owners of the objects within the collection (U'mista Cultural Centre, *The History of the Potlatch Collection*).

Multimedia Storytelling

The exhibition makes use of multimedia storytelling practices through images, objects, video, and written text to convey its messages. The objects are often accompanied by images of the items being worn or used, or videos of dancers in regalia performing their sacred dances, bringing to life the spirit that the objects possess and emphasizing their purpose (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The exhibition uses these different media in tandem to better tell the story of the Kwakwaka'wakw and makes use of a wide range of information media to discuss its themes and topics.

Emphasis on People, Not Things

A distinct emphasis on people as opposed to objects was noted in the exhibition, demonstrated by the types of information utilized by the exhibition. Object descriptions often include personal anecdotes and details of use and creation, and images of artifacts being worn or carried accompany the objects. The images utilized emphasize the person who made and wore

the objects seen in the exhibition instead of showing them out of context and removed from their original purpose. Many such images and videos are displayed with the artifacts from the museum's Potlach Collection.

Case Study Museum #2: The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, USA

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is a tribal museum on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation near Clewiston, Florida that houses more than 180,000 artifacts and archival documents concerning the Seminole Tribe of Florida and its history (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Museum History*). The museum opened in 1997 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of federal recognition of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's mission is to "Celebrate, Preserve, and Interpret Seminole Culture and History," which they work towards by utilizing permanent exhibitions to educate visitors on Seminole history as well as temporary exhibitions and online exhibitions focused on more specific subjects (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Our Mission*). In order to examine how the museum uses storytelling in its exhibition development approach, one online exhibition was examined as a case study of this museum's practices.

Exhibit: It's Not a Costume

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's exhibition, *It's Not a Costume: Modern Seminole Patchwork*, explores the culture of the Seminole people through the history of its fashion and style traditions. In the modern day, Seminole patchwork remains an important part of the wider Seminole culture with many Seminole people wearing their traditional clothing in their daily lives (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Contests and trade fairs often inspire creators to fashion new designs and patterns that still remain reflective of the traditional styles and methods of clothing construction (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Amongst

the Seminole, designs and patterns can hold great meaning, and can delineate information such as clan or family status or can be more universal (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The source of meaning in patchwork is closely linked to history and cultural pride, and unlike the garments worn by other cultural representatives such as the costumes that Irish Step Dancers wear patchwork is worn every day (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The clothing is not a costume solely worn during holidays or ceremonies, but rather hung in the closet with all the other daily wear that a good wardrobe requires (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*).

The exhibition exists as a web page with a series of links that lead to different subsections of the exhibition. The exhibition tells a comprehensive story about the history and meaning of the subject. The first section on modern patchwork provides a short explanation of the history of patchwork and how the invention of the sewing machine in the 1890's was essential to the development of the artform (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). According to the exhibition, the sewing machine impacted the lives of Seminole women in many of the same ways that other women were influenced by the machine; namely, the sewing machine took what was previously a time-consuming, painstaking task and made it much simpler and quicker (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Like many of the other innovations in what was considered women's work, the sewing machine allowed for much more leisure time among the labor class (including most Seminole women) which also allowed for more creativity and expression in a person's work (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Early Seminole patchwork was often constructed using calico cloth and ribbon obtained from traders with appliqué decoration, but during World War I, rationing and the inability to acquire ink for calico resulted in Seminole women using scrap fabric, sewing machines, and a good deal of ingenuity to create their works.

Eventually, appliqué work on clothing began to decline, and the introduction of ric-rac ultimately replaced appliquéd ribbons and strips (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*).

The next section of the exhibition offers a brief definition of what constitutes Seminole patchwork. The exhibit describes the four groups of Seminoles living in the US: the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, and independent Seminoles who refuse recognition, land, or assistance from the federal government (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). This is important to note as it represents a focus within the exhibition to self-define what it means to belong to the Seminole. The following sections of the exhibit discuss specific articles of clothing and their usage and creation. Women's shirts and skirts, men's shirts, jackets, and vests, and children's clothing are all discussed with text and images as examples (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*).

After the sections on specific clothing, the exhibit discusses patchwork contests, which are popular amongst the Seminole. Clothing contests on the reservations are ways for Seminole women to show off their skills and unveil designs that they have developed, and in the process these contests have helped preserve these traditional fashions (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Also discussed within the exhibition are Seminole dolls, which while not as intrinsic to Seminole culture as patchwork are useful in tracing the history and development of Seminole fashions (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). These dolls, constructed with palmetto fibers and cloth pieces, were often dressed in the fashions of the time (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). This allows for the preservation of the clothing styles and demonstrations of popular accessories and hair styles that would have accompanied these styles.

Patchwork is a distinctive process from other sewing techniques. Unlike with appliqué, which is applied to the surface of clothing, patchwork is part of the structure of the created

garment. Turning a patchwork garment inside-out will display the obverse of the design on the outside of the piece (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Early patterns, such as fire or rain, were simple designs that were easy to create, but as the art form developed more complicated designs such as the sacred fire, birds, or men on horseback began to be used (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). These symbols are representative of Seminole stories and peoples, acting as a physical representation of stories similar to a tapestry.

One of the most important sections of the exhibit discusses the appropriation of Seminole designs (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). Designers and clothing companies have been stealing tribal designs, appliqué, and patchwork to sell as their own, a trend which hurts Indigenous arts and tribal artists (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). By removing the designs from their original contexts, clothing companies dilute the meaning intrinsic in this distinctly Seminole artform (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The stories of Seminole patchwork are an important part of what makes the Seminole who they are, and this story is the focus of the exhibition.

Like the other case study institutions, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is focused on exhibitions about and of Indigenous cultures, and like the other case studies *It's Not a Costume* follows a narrative flow that begins with the early development of Seminole patchwork as an artform and ends with the modern usage and cultural significance. The exhibition discusses specific elements of the garments and the popularity of styles and fashions in the settings of contests which represent community interest and involvement. In this exhibition, a chronological storytelling pattern is evident.

Indigenous-led Development

It's Not a Costume demonstrates Indigenous-led development as an exhibition about Native American subjects produced by a Native American museum. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is owned and operated by the Seminole Tribe of Florida, so Indigenous people are involved in all aspects of the institution and its exhibitions (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *Museum History*).

Multimedia Storytelling

The exhibition has somewhat less emphasis on multimedia storytelling when compared to the previous case. This is due to the translation of the original museum exhibition, which was installed in the museum's physical space, to an online exhibit. Many of the original multimedia elements such as some photographs and video did not make it onto the exhibition site. However, theme is still present in the use of images, objects, and text to describe and define what makes Seminole patchwork an important piece of Seminole culture (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's not a costume*).

Emphasis on People, Not Things

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki's exhibition also shows a distinct focus on the people who make and wear the patchwork above the patchwork itself. The history of the art and the text from various sections describe the processes and creation that the women who made these garments utilized, emphasizing the daily use of patchwork clothing and the importance of making Seminole patchwork as part of a cultural patrimony that Seminole people partake in throughout their daily lives (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). In each section, the text emphasizes the individuals behind the objects, their creators and the people who wore the garments, more than it discusses the objects as artifacts.

Case Study Museum #3: The National Museum of the American Indian, USA

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is a part of the Smithsonian Institution, the largest museum complex in the world (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). NMAI operates three facilities which include the museum on the National Mall in Washington D.C., the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC) located at the Alexander Hamilton US Custom House in New York City, and the Cultural Resources Center (CRC) in Suitland, Maryland (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*).

The museum was founded with the National Museum of the American Indian Act passed in 1989 when the extensive Heye Collection was merged with the Smithsonian's existing Native American collection (Smithsonian Institution, *About the Museum*). The institution fulfills its commitment to its mission by ensuring that it works with Native American groups, tribes, and nations on every level, and by ensuring Native people are represented both within its exhibits and within its staff and leadership.

Exhibit: Circle of Dance

For the purposes of this case study, several online exhibitions by NMAI met the criteria for selection. In the end, *Circle of Dance* was chosen for its connection to storytelling elements that this thesis focuses on. The exhibition was originally installed from fall 2012 to fall 2017 at the NMAI facility in New York, but it has since been translated into an online exhibition format (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The exhibition begins with an introductory essay on the history and meaning of dance in the Native American context, text which describes the deep meaning and spirituality of the act of dancing for Native peoples (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

In the introductory essay, the curator of the exhibition Cécile R. Ganteaume describes the cultural power of dance. Ganteaume writes, “Native dances express core beliefs about the world and the most fundamental relationships upon which life depends” (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Several times throughout history, tribal dances were banned and outlawed, examples of which include the Ghost Dances and Sun Dances of the Plains peoples, and Northwest Coast Potlaches (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). These dance and music traditions serve to this day to bind Indigenous people to living things, to the earth around them, and most importantly to one another (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). These dances tell the stories of the people, from ancient battles to recent tragedies (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The exhibition presents ten social and ceremonial dances and their paraphernalia, in most instances described by their practitioners.

The first dance of the exhibition belongs to the Yup’ik people of Alaska. The Yup’ik call dancing *Yurapiaq*, which means real, genuine dance (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). An essay by Chuna McIntyre (Central Yup’ik Eskimo) describes the dances of her peoples, including the Qu yana (Thank You) Song Dance. She describes how her grandmother witnessed the traditional dances and seances, a personal connection that ties the Yup’ik together (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). According to McIntyre, the Yup’ik danced most often in the winter, a time for thanking the universe for the gifts of the land, sea, and sky (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

The essay accompanies a mannequin dressed in a decorated fur parka and leggings, with finger fans made with white caribou hair (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). These articles of clothing are specially crafted and lovingly decorated to allow the wearer to represent the spirit described in the dance (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The creation of this

sort of outfit is time-consuming, but it reinforces a connection to the traditional ways of the Yup'ik and their stories.

One of the exhibition's sections is dedicated to the Lakota Men's Northern Traditional Dance, a dance style that has become ubiquitous in intertribal pow-wows (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The essay, written by ethnomusicologist Tara Browner (Choctaw), explains the development of not only the traditional styles but also the related fancy styles seen at pow-wows (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). It is a style of dance that is often found in warrior cultures such as were common among Plains Indian groups (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Modern pow-wows are generally intertribal and open to visitors and outsiders, but in the earlier days of this style's use such dances were extremely private and exclusive, with only tribal members and the occasional ally being permitted to witness the dance (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Browner writes that in the pow-wow context, the acts of singing and dancing are a single action wherein the motion of the regalia and the accessories visually represents the beat of the drum (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Dancers tell stories with their motions and their footwork, imitating the animals who gave dance to humans or acting out heroic acts such as the stealing of horses or counting coup (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Dancers emphasize with their bodies the honor beats, or accented beats of the drum in groups of four or five that honor the warriors of the past (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

The regalia that accompanies the essay belongs to Robert Tiger, Jr. (Hunkpapa Lakota), and contains a group of items characteristic of Northern Traditional regalia style while still demonstrating the skill of their creator (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). At the center of the outfit is a beaded vest with primary design elements are taken from Plains hide paintings

and ledger-art motifs (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The pieces that make up this set of regalia are a form of storytelling in and of themselves, representing the maker's ancestors and homages to warriors of the past (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

Another of the exhibition's sections focuses on a dance of the Hopi people in Northern Arizona. Gloria Lomahaftewa (Hopi [Cloud/Water Clan]) wrote the essay that accompanies the ceremonial dress for a Hopi Butterfly Dance (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). This dance can be considered a coming-of-age ceremony for young Hopi girls, and it requires thorough practice and lessons to prepare for (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The men of the village select the 32 songs required for the dance, and the young women and their dance partner spend two days practicing the songs and learning the dances in the village *kiva*, which is an underground ceremonial chamber (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). At the end of the practice, the girls are given their *kopatsoki*, or headdresses that they will wear for the dance (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Once the dancing has been completed, the young girls are presented with their headdresses and new shawls, as well as a basket of groceries. In the weeks following, the girls and their families give presents of food and other offerings to the ones that gave the girls gifts, a reciprocal practice that recognizes family ties and friendships (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

The regalia of the Butterfly Dance consists of the *kopatsoki* as well as a traditional Hopi-style dress, a woven belt, beaded bracelets and anklets, and a brightly colored cloak or shawl (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The headdress is decorated with imagery related to the girl's clan or family, and sometimes the clan or family of the girl's partner, almost like a family crest (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

While these dances all have different origins and traditions, they share a number of common factors and principles. These dances each represent a set of storytelling practices, and the exhibition utilizes these dances to allow the audience to learn more about the people who perform them. Each section of the exhibition focuses on the personal experiences and beliefs of real people, most often described by Indigenous people themselves. This exhibition also shows audiences a series of lineages that the dancers in the exhibition are a part of, telling the story of their lives and their traditions.

NMAI's *Circle of Dance* follows a looser story framework within the exhibition, visible as a collection of stories unified by the single theme of the universal nature of dance and ceremony within Native American communities. Each section, dedicated to a different traditional style of dance, ultimately tells a similar story to the others. The exhibit's sections are united by the commonality of the dances and their motivations, practices, and regalia, synergized by the concise use of objects, still images, and videos demonstrating the dances and visualizing the spirituality of the dance for the audience.

Indigenous-led Development

Unlike the previous two case studies, NMAI is not a tribal museum, and thus does not share the as clear a connection to the theme of Indigenous-led development that the others do. Despite this, the museum prides itself on its high rate of Indigenous involvement at all levels of the museum. Within the exhibition, Native voices are used extensively in the essays that discuss each of the dances featured in the show, and the regalia itself was in several instances donated for the purpose of the exhibition by Native Americans and First Nations peoples (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). At every step of the exhibition development process, NMAI and the exhibition's curator strove to include Indigenous people in the creation of *Circle of Dance*.

Multimedia Storytelling

NMAI's *Circle of Dance* demonstrates multimedia storytelling by utilizing images, objects, personal and academic essays, and audiovisual texts to tell the story that the exhibit speaks to (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Some photographs show still images of a Hopi Butterfly Dance in progress, displaying the regalia used and implying the movement of the performers (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). This multimedia approach ultimately assists in conveying its point more accessibly it would have been if it consisted of nothing but text. This was an effective choice, because it would have been difficult for the exhibition to discuss dance without the context of music and motion, which would be hard to describe through essays alone. Dancing is a cultural practice that often exists in reference to and in relation with other elements such as music and story, thus making the inclusion of these elements in addition to written essays and garments more holistic within the exhibition setting (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

Emphasis on People, Not Things

Circle of Dance also emphasizes the people within the story of the exhibition more so than the objects that comprise it. The majority of the included essays consist of personal anecdotes and analysis of concepts related to the author's experiences and connection to the dances (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Images of people wearing regalia and performing the described dances are included in every section (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Even the choice to display the objects on mannequins is an intentional reminder of the act of dance as performed by the dancer, that these objects have a purpose that is based entirely on the way people wore and used them. This culminates in a museum exhibition that does not tell

the audience about the objects in it, but rather uses them as a means by which to tell the story of the dance and the dancers.

Comparative analysis

The case studies selected for examination and analysis in this research project included the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation in Florida, and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Through the course of analyzing the three case study institutions and their exhibitions, several common factors within the museums' exhibition development practices became apparent. These factors, while related to the original themes that this thesis analyzed in the literature of the field, are distinct and seemingly characteristic of museum exhibitions on Native American subjects.

Indigenous-led Development

The first of these newly identified elements is the theme of *Indigenous-led development*, wherein exhibitions were planned, created, and implemented with Native American voices present throughout the entire process. Native American voices were also particularly present in each of the case study institutions as a whole, which allowed for Indigenous people to tell their stories rather than having stories told of them. This theme is visible in the U'mista Cultural Centre in its *Living Traditions* exhibition. The contents of the exhibition, as well as the majority of the museums actual collection, are there at the behest of the Indigenous people whom those objects belong to (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Each family who lost sacred objects to the Potlach Ban was included in the decisions on what to do with the artifacts when they were returned (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). In addition, the text and images that accompany the exhibition were written and selected from the point of view of Kwak'wala-

speaking peoples, giving the sense of personal experience and self-definition (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*).

At the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, Indigenous-led development is demonstrated in the text and descriptions of the *It's Not a Costume* exhibition. The subject of the exhibition is explained through the voice of a Seminole person, with first-person and first-person plural language (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The exhibition is focused on a topic that is intrinsic to the Seminole, and its importance may not be apparent at first glance, the topic is treated with care and respect by the narrator and the institution (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). NMAI's exhibition, *Circle of Dance*, also utilizes Indigenous-led development. The organizational structure at NMAI includes many Native American scholars and professionals, but within the exhibit itself the vast majority of text was written by Indigenous people (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The essays that accompany the regalia of the exhibit describe the personal experiences of the authors and their relatives in the voice of Native people (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). At every level of the exhibition, Indigenous people were involved in the development of the final product.

Multimedia Storytelling

The second newly identified theme shared by the case study institutions is the extensive use of *multi-media storytelling practices*. Multi-media storytelling practices are the utilization of narrative tools and elements from many mediums, such as text, images, and three-dimensional objects. This particular approach already exists within the museum field, but the difference here is that the case study institutions seem to make a multi-media approach a focus. In a digital exhibition, it is often simpler to on text to convey meaning. However, it is important to include

images and objects that are the focus of the exhibit and are supported with effective text and writing.

All three case study institutions make use of multi-media storytelling within their exhibits, but of the three the U'mista Cultural Centre's emphasizes this the most. *Living Tradition* integrates text, objects, still images, and video footage. Many of the objects within and sections of the exhibit are supported by photographs and video of Kwakwaka'wakw people and ceremonies (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is does not utilize multimedia as effectively, but it makes use of a few example images to help describe the patchwork that is the focus of the exhibit. The introduction to the exhibit leads with an image of a blue patchwork dress that aids in conveying to the audience that products of Seminole craftsmanship are artistic works (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). NMAI's exhibit also leads with images and videos, paired with thoughtful essays and descriptions of the regalia featured in each section (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). Each of these case study institutions combine information from several mediums in order to better educate their audiences.

Emphasis on People, Not Things

The last theme explored in this research process is an *emphasis on people, rather than things*. There is a distinct focus on the individuals and communities exhibit objects come from as opposed to the artifacts themselves. To operate this way in the museum context seems counterintuitive, but by making exhibitions about people instead of about things, these case study institutions holistically represent the diverse cultures on which they are focused. This intent is demonstrated in the mission statements of the three case studies, as has been discussed previously, but it is important to note that none of the institutions' missions or vision statements

reference objects or the care of collections. Rather than museums be wholly focused on objects or their care, these museums use the objects within their collections to tell stories about the people who made those objects.

For example, in the *Living Tradition* exhibit from the U'mista Cultural Centre, the objects are discussed in terms of their purpose and use as the Kwakwaka'wakw see it (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). The masks and the potlach regalia are constructed to serve an important purpose, not to exist as objects d'art (U'mista Cultural Centre, *Living Tradition*). Not only is this reflective of the importance of people in these Native American museums, it also mirrors the beliefs and traditions of many Native American groups, who revere life above all other things and see material things as valuable only insofar as they are of use.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's exhibition reflects this as well, in a discussion of Seminole patchwork as an artistic expression intrinsic to the Seminole people rather than as fashion for fashion's sake (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The historical context in *It's Not a Costume* discusses the way these garments were worn and made, how the advancements in technology and impact of global events shaped their construction and use (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). The exhibition emphasizes the people who made and wore these garments, rather than the garments themselves (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, *It's Not a Costume*). In *Circle of Dance*, the curator of the exhibition aims for the same goal. Even by the simple design choice to display the dance regalia on mannequins rather than in cases, the curator reinforces the humanoid figure wearing the clothing. The regalia emphasizes, highlights, disguises, and hides parts or a whole of a person wearing it as intended by the creators and the traditions of the cultures the outfits come from (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*). The essays are overwhelmingly written by Indigenous people who are culturally connected to the

dances being discussed. The authors lead with personal anecdotes or historical research that references the people who wore the clothes, how they were made, and what it all means (Smithsonian Institution, *Circle of Dance*).

In each of these case study museums, these themes are present, demonstrating a set of elements that have potential applications in other museums, most especially those with collections from Indigenous cultures. In each case, the implementation of these elements helps the exhibitions they are found in promote a holistic representation of Native Americans to non-native audiences.

Summary

This chapter explained and analyzed the data that was collected in the course of this thesis. The chapter began with an introduction that referenced the criteria for selection that each case study institution was subjected to, as well as an explanation of the selected cases and a reiteration of the research question guiding the research. Each of the case study museums was briefly introduced, followed by an examination of their mission statements. An online exhibition from each institution was selected and studied, with a thorough breakdown of the exhibition and its content followed by an analysis of the exhibition in reference to the key themes identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis. This process was repeated for each case study museum and each of their exhibits. Then, a comparative analysis of all of the cases was conducted with reference to the three new themes identified in the course of this research. These key themes are Indigenous-led development, multimedia storytelling practices, and an emphasis on people rather than things.

The final chapter presents the implications for the field based on the findings of the research, as well as recommendations for further research about this topic and the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 5

Discussion & Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter details the conclusion of the research study which was created to answer the following research question:

RQ: How can storytelling and narrative exhibition development be used to give voice to Native American art, history, and culture in the modern museum space?

In the course of the research guided by this question, three key themes were identified within the cases selected for analysis. These themes, which represent practices that the chosen museums utilize are *Indigenous-led development*, *multimedia storytelling*, and an *emphasis on people, not things*.

Indigenous-led development is the practice of including Indigenous people in the leadership and development of museum exhibitions pertaining to Native American subjects. Multimedia storytelling is a technique wherein museums make extensive use of various media in tandem, such as objects, video and audio, wall text, guided tours and community programs, and other means by which the museum can communicate to the audience the story being told in the exhibition. Lastly, an emphasis on people as opposed to objects was noted in the cases. This emphasis promotes the individuals and communities that created the objects within an exhibition, rather than the objects for their own sake.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the thesis thus far, followed by a discussion of the findings as identified in Chapter 4. Recommendations based on the studies are presented followed by an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study as well as suggestions for

further research on this topic. Lastly, the chapter finishes with a conclusion that addresses the answer to the research question.

Thesis overview

This project sought to determine which, if any, traits and practices museums can use to more effectively communicate Native American culture within exhibitions. In the first chapter of this thesis, a brief explanation of the conflicts between Indigenous communities in the U.S. and Canada and the museum field was discussed, with the introduction of the research question that directed this thesis. Chapter 1 introduced the arguments of several prominent scholars in the museum field as well as those of Indigenous scholars, wherein a shared focus on storytelling was identified. This focus was a primary consideration throughout the creation of this thesis.

Following Chapter 1's introduction to the problem, a literature review was conducted of the relevant research on the subjects of Indigenous culture, museum exhibitions, storytelling, and Narrative Theory. Within the examination of Indigenous culture, common factors were identified with reference to both storytelling and museum exhibitions, and NAGPRA was discussed for its importance in the relations between Indigenous people and museum institutions. The subject of museum exhibitions was identified in the relevant literature, with specific emphasis on both physical and digital approaches to exhibitions in museums. The analysis of Indigenous culture and museum exhibitions led to the identification of storytelling as a shared element central to the two subjects, especially in storytelling's capacity as an effective educational tool. Together these subjects led the researcher to Narrative Theory, which informed the construction and refinement of the research question.

The literature review conducted in Chapter 2 created a grounded basis that was used to create a study as laid out in Chapter 3. This chapter described the process and criteria for

selecting three museums with online exhibitions that would serve as cases in a qualitative, problem-solving collective multiple case study. The three institutions, the U'mista Cultural Centre, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian, were introduced and examined, with consideration given to their histories, missions, and how each institution fulfilled the criteria for selection. Discussed within this chapter were the methods for data collection and data analysis, determined by the chosen methodology and the study's design as established by the researcher.

Chapter 4 described the results of the study proposed in the third chapter. Each of the case studies was briefly reintroduced before diving into analysis of the exhibition chosen for each case to represent their use of the factors identified in the literature review. Each exhibition was examined broadly before focused analysis with consideration of each factor in isolation. Through the course of the initial examination of the exhibitions, three key themes were identified in the approaches that each museum used in their Native American focused exhibitions. These key themes, *Indigenous-led development*, *multimedia storytelling*, and *an emphasis on people rather than things*, were then used to retroactively analyze the exhibitions. After the sections dedicated to each case, the chapter describes a comparative analysis of the cases using the identified key themes to compare and contrast the approaches each institution used in relation to one another.

Discussion

The primary findings of this study consist of the three key themes identified in the course of the research, each of which when utilized by the case institutions allows for the more effective and holistic representation of Native American art, history, and culture for non-Indigenous

audiences. These key themes are reflected in the literature of the field, as examined in the literature review chapter of this thesis, in the following ways.

Indigenous-led Development

Indigenous-led development was evident in the efforts of all three museums, two of which serve as examples of tribal-owned museums. Indigenous involvement in the exhibition process promotes inclusion and diversity of thought in the exhibition process. This also serves to combat a phenomenon that Chan (2021) describes, of museums telling stories for Indigenous peoples as opposed to with them. Historically, Native American history has relied on the perspectives of Western historical figures, and even today this has not changed for many institutions (Chan, 2021). The inclusion of Indigenous voices in the development process of exhibitions can help address this.

Many of the difficulties between Native Americans and the museum field seem to stem from misunderstandings and stereotypes that have persisted within the museum as an institution. Simpson (1991) discusses the representation of Native Americans as primitive opposition to the heroic figures of cowboys or the military, generating a caricature of “the Red Man.” Native arts are dissected and examined through the lens of the dominant, Western culture, reinforcing notions of an imaginary past where Indigenous people remain static elements of the broader colonial history (Rangel, 2012). In many cases, museums offer simplistic depictions of Native Americans while serving as the primary repositories of Indigenous remains and the cultural patrimony of Native American peoples (Deloria, 2018).

Despite this, the museum field and Native peoples’ shared culture of storytelling makes cooperation potentially effective as well as beneficial (Chan, 2021). Indigenous-led exhibition development practices allow for Native people to tell their own stories within the museum space,

while ensuring that museum exhibitions make use of the storytelling practices that serve best to educate the public (Bedford, 2001; Iseke, 2013; Stogner, 2017). This also allows for museums to better challenge outdated stereotypes and invite cross-cultural comparison from audiences, two elements of museum storytelling as defined by DiBlasio & DiBlasio (1983).

Multimedia Storytelling

Multimedia storytelling practices were identified less unilaterally in the case study institutions than the previous theme, but it still was visible to some degree with each of the cases. Many museums already use this practice as a standard by virtue of the use of objects and text, but within the confines of an online exhibition like any of the cases chosen effective utilization of multimedia storytelling is paramount (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018; Wyman et al., 2011). Images, text, objects, as well as video and audio are all media that exhibitions can use to convey information to audiences and visitors. Integration of disparate media allows for an exhibition to more effectively communicate.

Museums with their use of objects in tandem with wall text, images, and live tours already make use of multimedia storytelling practices, but many institutions are striving to take it further. The advent of broad internet accessibility and social media has radically impacted the nature of storytelling in museums, adding a new element to the multimedia practices of museums: a more focused dialogue between the museum and audiences (Stogner, 2017; Wyman et al., 2011). Wyman et al. (2011) argue that museums, which once represented an authoritarian voice speaking to the public through the medium of exhibitions has begun to shift into a multi-faceted experience that invites conversation.

Another way in which multimedia storytelling exists within the literature of the field is the growing interest for both the public and the academic worlds in *transmedia storytelling*,

which Collins (2013) defines as presenting narrative through multiple media and by more than one method. Transmedia storytelling exists as a natural extension of multimedia storytelling, utilizing many means and media to communicate narrative to audiences (Collins, 2013; Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018). Museums that make use of multimedia storytelling practices can be seen as transmedia institutions that utilize multiple forms of media to communicate with audiences (Mateos-Rusillo & Gifreu-Castells, 2018; Wyman et al., 2011).

Emphasis on People, Not Things

Finally, the case study institutions all exhibited a focused emphasis on people and communities more so than the objects on display. Throughout each exhibition, evident care was taken to explain and display how the objects were used, how they were made, who made each item, where the components came from, and what the object means to the people it came from. Indigenous cultures are vibrant and present communities that often suffer from assumptions of primitivism and ancient identity (Bousé, 1996; Rangel, 2012; Simpson, 1991). The focus on people helps to inform visitors about disparate cultures with distinct cultures.

Academics in the museum field such as Bedford (2001), Stogner (2017), and Ryan (2008) discuss the importance of storytelling in museums, as well as their efficacy as educational tools. Stories, however, also reflect the distinct emphasis on people that this third theme argues. Hampton and DeMartini (2017) argue that stories and storytelling possess a power of meaning-making, with the stories that people are told as well as the ones they tell inevitably reflecting and framing understandings of themselves. Stories are presented from a point of view and imply or outright state morality which speaks to the people involved in the storytelling more so than the contents of the story (Bedford, 2001; Ryan, 2008). In this way, the objects within museum exhibitions exist as an element of the museum's storytelling, as when they are properly utilized,

they speak more to the communities that produced them and the history of past peoples than they do to their own edification (Baker et al., 2016; Phelan et al., 2012). Ultimately, this emphasis on people rather than things has been of deep interest to the museum field for some time (Weil, 1999).

Recommendations

The findings of this study were instrumental in identifying the themes of Indigenous-led development, multimedia storytelling, and an emphasis on people, not things. These themes take the form of practices that can be implemented in museum exhibitions to more effectively develop museum exhibitions focused on Native American subjects.

The first theme, Indigenous-led development, can be achieved by means of the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the planning and development processes of museum exhibitions as well as day-to-day museum operations. The inclusion of Native Americans in the museum process from start to finish facilitates better relations between Native communities and museums, and it allows Indigenous people the opportunity to tell their stories to audiences, in contrast to the ways that museums have told stories of indigenous people in the past. The case study institutions examined in this research study all make extensive use of Indigenous-led development, which leads to a more inclusive understanding of the Indigenous cultures that the museums are representing with their collections.

Multimedia storytelling is utilized in many museums, but the focus on multimedia storytelling in museum exhibitions about Native American subjects is paramount to holistically and successfully communicating said subjects. Exhibitions that display Indigenous artifacts devoid of context do a disservice to the cultures from which those objects hail. By combining objects with exhibition components like video or text, audiences can better understand the

contexts and stories those objects represent. For example, if an exhibition were to display the regalia of an Yup'ik dancer, ensuring that the garments were accompanied by a video of the dance being performed or speakers playing the music of a drum circle in the Yup'ik style would help non-Native audiences connect to the meaning of the objects and understand how the people who made them used such artifacts.

Finally, an emphasis on people, rather than the objects they made is important to exhibitions, both those that discuss Indigenous cultures and those that focus on other subjects. As previously mentioned, for much of the past in museums, Native American objects were relegated to natural history collections and discussed in the manner as flora and fauna specimens, reinforcing an implicit stereotype that Indigenous cultures were dead and gone. By discussing objects with reference to their owners and creators, however, these kinds of interpretations can be avoided. Museum exhibitions that emphasize the individuals and communities that the artifacts stem from, such as the exhibitions examined in this case study, seem to better represent the cultures and stories of Indigenous people. This emphasis can be implemented in museum exhibitions by discussing at every opportunity the who's and why's of the objects, with consideration for the objects insofar as they were of use, rather than as generic works.

By implementing these practices, museum exhibitions may better tell stories and discuss their subjects. While demonstrably effective for Native American subjects, these themes can also be applied to other kinds of museum exhibitions. For example, exhibitions in art museums, especially those catering to modern art may find the focus on multimedia storytelling beneficial in communicating with their audiences. In short, this study recommends the inclusion of these techniques in museum exhibitions centered on Indigenous subjects, with the further opinion that these practices have broader applications in museum exhibitions as a whole.

Strengths and limitations of the study

This project recognizes the limitations of the case study methodology, including the difficulty in generalizing the results of case studies as textual and content analysis are ultimately subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). By virtue of the case study method, the cases chosen serve only as a small sample of possible examples of the phenomena the research seeks to examine. In addition, qualitative research is unavoidably impacted by the interpretations of the researcher, which can be impacted by their biases and experiences (Hyett et al., 2014). Other researchers may come to different conclusions than the initial researcher has. Despite these limitations, however this study has produced themes backed by thorough and in-depth examination of the chosen cases. The methods utilized in this study can be utilized with different case study institutions or exhibitions and the results, while they may differ, would still be valuable and insightful for the museum field as a whole.

Suggestions for further research

This research project sought to examine cases of museums with a focus on Native American art history and culture to determine what practices enabled the representation of these subjects in museum exhibitions. After analysis of the three cases selected for this study, three key themes emerged. A review of the literature revealed a gap in the literature at the intersections of Indigenous culture, museum exhibitions, and storytelling.

Future studies may find examination of museums which do not only focus on Native American subjects but possess collections of Indigenous artifacts beneficial in understanding the practices that make for holistic representation of such subjects. Should further research be conducted on this topic, noting what differences may be apparent in a physical exhibition as opposed to the digital exhibitions that were selected for this study due to the researcher's

constraints could offer insight. Future researchers may also consider using interviews with both Native and non-Native participants to examine what audiences interpret from the case study exhibitions. An understanding of the opinions of visitors about specific exhibitions may speak to the efficacy of applied practices. In addition, the study of other kinds of museums, such as art or science museums, with consideration towards the identified themes may yield interesting results.

Conclusion

Museums and Indigenous communities have shared tensions resulting from the way Native Americans have been discussed and depicted by museums. This tension is steadily improving but understanding what practices can further promote the dissolution of this conflict can only serve to make museums more welcoming and inclusive, as well as more respectful, to all visitors. A gap in the research was identified in the literature of the museum field, specifically where Indigenous culture, museum exhibitions, and storytelling meet. While a plethora of research was identified conflating Native American culture and storytelling, as well as museum exhibitions and storytelling, the convergence of these subjects was much less robust. This gap resulted in the creation of the guiding research question for this research study. A content analysis of the selected case studies based on this question revealed the three key themes identified in chapter 4.

In summary, this project has expanded upon the museum studies field by identifying and examining three practices utilized in effective museums of Native American art, history, and culture which may be used other museums with collections relating to the aforementioned subjects in order to more holistically represent Indigenous communities with museum exhibitions.

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