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# The Dynamics of Community Museums and Their Communities: Museo de las Americas' Spanish Happy Hour Fostering Social Inclusion for the Latino and Denver Metro Area Communities

Maritza Hernandez-Bravo  
*University of Denver*

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**The Dynamics of Community Museums and Their Communities:  
Museo de las Americas' Spanish Happy Hour Fostering Social Inclusion for the  
Latino and Denver Metro Area Communities**

A Thesis

Presented to  
the Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Maritza Hernandez-Bravo

June 2017

Advisor: Richard Clemmer-Smith

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Title: The Dynamics of Community Museums and Their Communities:

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Advisor: Richard Clemmer-Smith

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### **Abstract**

Many museums are now aspiring to collaborate and engage with Latino communities and the community as a whole. Due to Museo de las Americas status as a community museum, I predicted that I would find a collaborative effort already occurring between the institution and their community, which can aid in creating a sense of social inclusion by being committed to including diverse voices by having clarity of purpose that makes sense both within the context of the community and the institution itself. I used staff, volunteer and visitor interviews and observations of the program to evaluate the degree of collaboration and the experiences of the visitors, specifically Latinos. I discover the essential factors to genuinely engage community is through building internal capacity to create a community centered mindset and conclude with recommendations for how museums can approach community collaboration and engagement to have a significant social impact.

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## **Chapter 1: Collaboration and Engagement Through the Communities' Eyes**

The demographics in the United States are more diverse than ever and will continue to become more diverse with the Latino population becoming the majority-minority within the next 30 years. Today many museums aspire to be socially inclusive and have a social impact by democratizing their practices and being committed to connecting with these marginalized communities. Community collaboration and engagement are huge cultural shifts that museums are now attempting to make when embracing critical museum theory to try to connect with not only marginalized communities, but also a dynamic larger community. What does this look like? How does an historically elite institution strive to step back from its authoritative stance and become partners with its' community, especially an underrepresented community? How can museums genuinely engage their community? What tools can museums use to determine the degree of collaboration actually achieved during the project?

To explore these larger themes, this research focuses on a case study of the evaluation Museo de las Americas' Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program. This research will use how Museo defines their culture and community as a baseline to evaluate if their program, Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, truly embodies a collaborative effort and serves a larger social responsibility tied to expanding and fostering identity for both the Latino community and the Denver Metro Area community they are attempting to serve. I chose Museo because it is a community museum focused

on Latin American art and I decided to focus on Spanish Happy Hour because it was a unique program due to its Spanish speaking emphases and social aspects. Due to Museo's status as a community museum, I predicted that I would find a collaborative effort already occurring between the institution and their community, which can aid in creating a sense of social inclusion by being committed to including diverse voices by having clarity of purpose that makes sense both within the context of the community and the institution itself. These characteristics will aid in my evaluation of collaboration, community engagement, social inclusion and identity. To aid in the evaluation process, a visitor-focused approach is used to obtain a holistic and critical view of the program from those it is intended for.

My research is visitor-focused and investigates if and how Museo is engaging and collaborating with the community they aim to serve by focusing on their monthly program Spanish Happy Hour program that has evolved into ConnectArte. Using a culturally responsive visitor studies paradigm, I evaluated Museo's collaboration and engagement efforts by using a framework characterizing collaborative efforts in archaeological practice that has been adapted for this research. Thus, I find an evaluation framework utilizing a culturally responsive visitor studies paradigm and getting an emic perspective on the culture of Museo as an institution, to be useful not only in taking a critical view of Museo's community collaboration and engagement, but also for conducting anthropological research (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 184).

An evaluation can be anthropological by using a culturally responsive paradigm to view the visitor and Museo staff as holistically and as complex as possible and how that affects their museum experience (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 185). An evaluation



framework is also useful when utilizing a framework for characterizing collaborative efforts in a project, provided by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson. In this framework, collaboration in practice exists on a continuum from “resistance” to “collaboration” with “participation” in between, this is used to evaluate the collaborative efforts of Museo to engage their community and whether or not more effort needs be strategically placed to more effectively develop collaborative and engaging programing. To define these different modes, the authors propose 6 features, including: how goals develop, how information flows among stakeholders, how much stakeholders are involved, how support is gained among stakeholders and how the needs of stakeholders are considered (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008: 10). Below is table 1 “Collaboration Conceived as a Continuum of Practice”, describing these three different modes in conjunction with their relation to the 6 features:

Table 1

<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
Goals developed in opposition	Goals developed independently	Goals developed jointly
Information is secreted	Information is disclosed	Information flows freely
No stakeholder involvement	Limited stakeholder involvement	Full stakeholder involvement
No voice for stakeholders	Some voice of the stakeholder	Full voice for stakeholder
No support is given/obtained	Support is solicited	Support is tacit
Needs of others unconsidered	Needs of most parties mostly met	Needs of all parties realized

(Colwell-Chanthaponh and Ferguson 2008:11, Table 1 collaboration continuum)

This research will give insight to if and how critical museum theory is being put into practice with Museo's Spanish Happy Hour program. The field of evaluation has primarily focused on providing user-specific feedback on developing, determining the effectiveness bases on intended outcomes and improving programs. Thus, there are many within the field that say evaluation is not generalizable; that each evaluation is unique and does not aim to add further explanation to an existing theory.

Even though an evaluation framework is project-specific, it can be used as an aid in anthropological research, as a project targeted by the institution as an example of engaging and collaborating with the community, the Latino community specifically, which has been elusive to museums across the nation. It can be a useful tool towards better understanding how critical museum theory is put into practice because evaluating community engagement and collaboration through a specific project allows one to investigate specifically what practices are being implemented, what practices are not being implemented and the steps to improve in order to achieve these goals, which are intrinsically tied to the principals of critical museum theory.

Using the tool of evaluation in this research can aid in determining to what extent Museo is or is not implementing new critical museum theory into their practice. The evaluation focuses on Museo's collaboration and engagement with the community in their programming efforts. In the context of my research at Museo, evaluation is also used to 1) familiarize myself with the culture of Museo 2) investigate the views on identity tied to social inclusion and museum motives of the Latino audience and the Denver Metro Area community 3) to understand how Museo's intended goals with the

Latino audience and the Denver Metro Area community are actually being received and how this effects the audience's engagement.

## **Questions**

One main research question and 6 sub-research questions have guided this research. Each of the sub-questions specifically addresses one aspect of the main question:

1. *Main Research Question:* How can ethnically specific museums promote intercultural dialogue (community members of different cultural backgrounds) by means of social inclusion for the communities they are trying to serve, through community engagement, collaboration and programming?
2. *Sub-question:* How collaborative has Museo been with their Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program?
3. *Sub-Question:* Are Museo's goals and objectives being attained during programming targeted to engage the Latino community?
4. *Sub-Question:* Why are Latinos attending Museo's Spanish Happy Hour?
5. *Sub-question:* How are Latinos experiencing Museo's on-going program, "Spanish Happy Hour"? Are they experiencing their Latinidad (Latino identifiers)?
6. *Sub-question:* Is Museo attempting to promote community or ethnicity/culture/identity or both? This can take several forms, such as exhibits and programming focusing on Latino culture being inclusive of a

Pan-Latinidad identity, which is dynamic, or exhibits and programming focusing on specific community history and issues.

### **Museo de las Americas as an Institution**

#### **Observation/Participant observation**

I used participant observation throughout my research to become familiarized with Museo de las Americas' events, audience, staff and the culture of the institution. I began participant observations when I started my collections internship with Museo in May 2015 and continued as a volunteer after my official internship ended at the end of August 2015 until May 2016. I spent approximately 8-10 hours a week at Museo working with the collections manager, Nathan Bufe, on organizing the collections, packaging and getting objects ready for exhibits. Through this experience I was able to become part of the Museo *familia*, building rapport with the staff and other regular volunteers and interns. *Familia* translates to family in Spanish. In many Latin American cultures, from my own specifically Mexican understanding, *familia* has the connotations of a deep bond, a sense of inclusion, love and care beyond merely an acquaintance type of relationship. I wrote down the activities I participated in each day, took pictures and wrote a bi-weekly report for my internship credit, which aided me in organizing my activities and thoughts. I also took note of how different departments worked together. After my summer internship was complete I began volunteering every other week for about 4 hours aiding in the public relations department and the education department to continue to build my rapport, understand the culture of the institution and to experience volunteering in different departments under different staff. This approach enabled me to obtain a holistic

view of how Museo works on a daily basis, the type of work ethic and philosophies they use in their work and with volunteers/interns.

### **Interviews**

To begin the evaluation process, I needed to fully understand what Museo de Las Americas overall goals and objectives are regarding their Latino audience. To do this I conducted a structured questionnaire that I emailed in June 2015 to two members of the staff asking questions regarding their goals, objectives and overall mission with this audience. I also asked questions about what identity, inclusivity and intercultural dialogue means to Museo, and how would Museo define these terms as an institution. This enabled me to get a general understanding of how Museo staff defined the institution and defined their goals with the Latino community and how they interpreted specific concepts I was investigating in my research. Doing this at the beginning of my research aided me in creating a survey I used for visitors and to give me a frame of reference to move forward in my other research methods.

Based off of the answers I received from the questionnaires, I created questions for semi-structured interviews with the staff. The staff semi- structured interviews focused on the concepts presented in the questionnaire and how they defined their culture and community. I explored what characterized their culture through their mission, values and goals. I conducted these interviews between August 2015 and September 2015. Two of these interviews were structured questionnaires due to staff members' limited time and ability to answer these questions only through email. Two of these interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, using the questionnaire as an interview guide in order to be able to make comparisons across all four. I sent out this questionnaire to

visitors who had given me their emails, which I asked for previously, to participate in my research, as well as staff members because they are part of the Latino museumgoer community. I took into consideration their biases of being museum professionals.

To complement the first interviews I conducted with the staff, I created another semi-structured interview to gain more in depth answers to similar, but more specific questions after my research developed from data I had gathered using other methods. This interview focused on how Museo engages with their community, how Museo view and define their community and its needs, what values Museo encompasses and their goals with the community. These interviews were conducted between October 2015-February 2016 and were audio recorded while I took notes. The semi-structured approach allowed me to get more in depth perspectives on complex questions about Museo's interactions with the community they are serving. The free flowing nature of the semi-structured interview allowed me to have a comfortable conversation with the staff and gave them the freedom to express themselves more extensively.

### **Mission Statement and Strategic Plan**

My final method in examining Museo de las Americas as an institution was looking at supplementary texts. Looking at how Museo's mission statement has evolved through time to become what it is today has given me an understanding of not only the culture of the institution, but also how it has attempted to interact with their community, thus shedding light on how the community perceives Museo as well. I also looked at Museo's strategic plan from 2010-2012 and 2012-2015, which gave me a great overview of staff's roles, specific goals they are aspiring to in specific departments and aspects of the museum and how they plan to achieve them. These documents have given me the

specifics of what Museo is trying to achieve and also the mindset and culture of the institution. I sought out key words and themes that I coded from staff interviews.

## **Museo's Visitors and Volunteers**

### **Participant/ Observation**

Spanish Happy Hour was the program I focused on for my research. I attended 5 Spanish Happy Hours, with 3 of those having a more in depth approach due to my thesis focus. Spanish Happy Hour occurs every third Friday of the month from 5pm-8pm. When I attended in July and August 2015, I only handed out surveys, so I was limited to the front of the museum taking note mainly of demographic information, age, gender, race and looking into why they attended Spanish Happy with the help of survey information. I also took note of which people came with, and their relationship to them. These first two times I stayed for the first two hours. The third time I went in September 2015 and I went as a visitor to enjoy the event. I took informal notes on how people were interacting with each other and the space (looking at art or not or more into the social aspect of the event).

When I attended the event in October and November 2015 I took a much more systematic approach to my observations. In the first hour I talked to volunteers and presenters/community participants in the program and I took note of who people were with pairs, groups, individuals. I tried to determine their relationship to each other family, friends, spouse. I tried to determine if they were Latino indicators: language, code switching and how they interacted with the museum space looking at specific art, talking with others, keeping to themselves, drinking, talking with staff, content of conversations, peoples' general attitudes about attending the event such as enjoyment, comfortable or

boredom. I also looked at who was practicing Spanish specifically people at different levels of Spanish and people from different cultural backgrounds.

I continued my observations of visitors various behaviors that I just outlined, into the second hour. This varied a bit at each event due to the different nature of each program, October 2015 was a print making workshop and a presentation on nutrition and November 2015 was the Mercado de Navidad where local vendors could sell their items and visitors could do early Christmas shopping. The last hour I continued to observe visitors' behaviors and take note of when people left the event. I then ended the night by talking with volunteers, staff and community participants in the event. For the October event, I was only able to stay the first hour and half due to personal matters. I did not attend the new ConnectArte event that has replaced Spanish Happy Hour in January, a burlesque show, because it was cancelled due to not enough RSVP's. Due to these unforeseen circumstances I attended the ConnectArte event in February, La Segunda Clothing Swap, and used the same systematic technique to break up the event that I used in October and November 2015.

### **Interviews**

I utilized unstructured informal interviews during Spanish Happy Hour with volunteers and visitors. These interviews covered topics to uncover Latino communities' motives to attend the program/event, what they liked and disliked about the program/event, did it connect to them on a personal level, did it make them feel closer to their community and how did they interpreted the program. I used a culturally responsive visitor studies paradigm to consider the visitor holistically and as complex as possible (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 185). Conducting informal interviews during events was



the most realistic tool to use to not disturb the experience of the events. I guided the conversation asking questions, when possible, about why they were at this event, what was their favorite aspect of the event, have they been to this event before, and does this event make you feel closer to your community.

I also used a semi-structured interview format when interviewing long-time volunteer Melissa. Melissa had volunteered at Spanish Happy Hour consistently for three years, giving her a unique emic perspective that varied from the staff. Due to her in depth experience with Museo and being a Latina, I used a semi-structured interview to help create a more open dialogue between the two of us to hopefully encourage a deeper sharing of experiences. The interview focused on the volunteer's motivation to volunteer, her experiences volunteering, what she valued about volunteering and her relationship with Museo. This perspective aided in critically evaluating what Museo staff had said, however I kept in mind the biases the volunteer may have developed about Museo as well. I conducted the interview in February 2016.

### **Supplementary Texts**

I did evaluation background research done at other institutions in Denver on the Latino audience and about Latino audiences as museums goes in the United States. This gave me a general overview of the knowledge that has been gained thus far in the museum field about Latino visitors. I completed this early in my research, May 2015.

## **Discourse Analysis**

The majority of my data is extracted from the interviews with Museo staff, visitors and volunteers. Discourse analysis was used to analyze and interpret the various interviews, as conversations bring about cultural clues. I combed through my interviews mainly using word/concept repetition within and between interviews to find emerging themes. Repetition is finding the same concept and/or word occurring in a text. When interviewing Melissa, she referred again and again to ideas associated with motivations for volunteering, love of the relationships and experiences she had during Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte and how comfortable she felt at Museo. Due to the repetition of these concepts and words I was able to conclude that these are important themes. After I had a list of emerging themes I used the method of cutting and sorting to create umbrella themes or codes. I identified important quotes, called exemplars and then arranged the quotes into piles of things that go together. For example, with Melissa's interview I was able to create sub themes from the quotes I separated related to motivations for volunteering, which were, practicing Spanish, topics/exhibits and the social interactions.

## **Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review**

The demographics in the United States are becoming more diverse and will continue to diversify with the Latino population becoming the majority- minority within the next 30 years. According to a PEW Research Center report, the modern Latin American-dominated immigration is by far the largest in U.S. history, with nearly 40 million immigrants coming to the U.S. since 1965 (PEW 2009: 4). U.S. born Latinos straddle two cultures and two worlds at all times creating an emerging identity. The integration process and feeling socially included may be eased with the help of informal education institutions such as museums. Today, museums aspire to be culturally relevant and be agents of social change by being committed to engagement with these marginalized communities. What innovative steps are being taken to promote social inclusion, diversity and community engagement with the complex Latino community? Museo de Las Americas, an ethnically specific/community museum in Denver, has attempted to promote social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and community collaboration with Denver's elusive Latino community.

### **The Growing Latino Audience**

Museums have a long history of having elitist roots and an audience that is predominately white. They have held the power and authority over the representation of marginalized groups such as Latinos and immigrants. As Janet Marstine discusses in her article, "The Contingent Nature of the New Museum Ethics," it has only been in the last

30 years that museums have started to adopt a new museum ethics of social inclusion, radical transparency and shared guardianship to encourage being committed to serving their diversifying community (Marstine 2011:1). The face of the United States is changing institutionalized ‘norms’ of museum practice to better serve this diversifying community is necessary. In 2008, the American Association of Museums launched a forecasting report “Museums & Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures”, it depicted how the group that has historically been the core audience for museums- non-Hispanic whites – will be a minority of the population (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:5). The report was read on a mass scale and was used to structure institutional planning and start conversations on engaging communities (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:5). In response to this, a 2010 report was released through The Center for Future Museums, “Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums” to continue the conversation and serve as a call to action to museums to diversify and stay culturally relevant institutions to their changing communities (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:5).

In the United States, Latinos are numbering more than 53 million, or 17% of the U.S. population in 2013 and 19 million of them are immigrants (Lopez and Patten 2015). Latinos are the largest and youngest minority in the United States with one in four newborns being Latinos (PEW 2009:1). The children of those immigrants now account for the plurality of the Latino youth population (PEW 2009:13). The majority of native born Latinos are between the ages of 16-25 and are being socialized in a family setting that places a strong emphasis on their Latin American roots (PEW 2009:13). The Latino population, immigrants and native born, continues to be diverse and can trace their roots

to every part of Latin America (Lopez and Patten 2015). While there is this strong encouragement to speak Spanish and maintain their distinct culture, it is important to Latinos to blend into American culture as well, hence the majority of Latinos being 41% bilingual (PEW 2009:8).

How willingly and quickly immigrant groups join the mainstream is determined by social conditions and policies that are politically and culturally volatile (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:11). Museums can help with social inclusion by offering a safe space and a link into the community. This can help with the social conditions especially now with the current political climate being so volatile towards immigrants. As a ramification of 9/11, the fear culture has continued to persist. Racial tensions have continued to increase in the U.S. and museums are one of the few institutions that have the potential to create a safe space where many cultures can come together and learn from one another instead of fear one another. The growing Latino community, native born and immigrants, create and will become the mainstream. Understanding this diverse and dynamic community is key for museums to offer them a space to help them feel socially included in the greater American society. As Seth Holmes concludes in his book, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, in order to combat naturalized inequalities change must occur at all levels of society, museums can contribute to that change (Holmes 2013:191).

## **Museums and Their Communities**

Latino communities are heterogeneous and include recent immigrants, tenth generation Americans, the poor, working-class families, the educated, the high school dropout, those who reject their “whiteness” and those who embrace it. All live and work in the same areas (Davalos 2001:25). Having a bilingual program is a good start in aiding the Latino community in feeling included; yet it is not nearly enough. Janet Marstine argues that social inclusion is central to creating a changing and sustainable museum for the 21st century that needs to be receptive of the diversity of once marginalized groups that are creating identity through their heritage (Marstine 2011:4). The idea of heritage in museological and anthropological discourse is defined by Rodney Harrison as primarily not being about the past, but instead about our relationship with the present and the future (Harrison 2013: 4). Heritage is more about the meaning placed upon selected items, which are marked out by identity to be produced and exchanged through social interaction (Graham and Howard 2008: 5). Elizabeth Croke highlights in her article “Museums and Community” that the idea of community and community engagement is drawn into the museum sector through projects that assert local identities (Croke 2006: 183).

The relationships between museums and marginalized communities are ever changing. For Ivan Karp (1992:2), museums have the power to represent and can be perceived as places for making meaning and negotiating and debating identity. With this power, museums have the capacity to be agents of social change, moving away from ‘othering’ and Eurocentric practices by sharing power with these communities. Karp

refers to Edmund Barry Gaither's argument that acknowledging this role is not enough and asserts that we must also acknowledge the complex nature of people's identities and the histories of their communities (Karp 1992:24). The individual interprets museum exhibitions through prior experiences and culturally learned beliefs, values and perceptual skills gained through membership in multiple communities (Karp 1992:3). Karp discusses personal identities as complex entities that are fashioned from community identities as well as other identities and experiences (Karp 1992:15). As previously mentioned, many native born Latinos are children of immigrants who try to instill pride of their Latin countries into their children. Being members of multiple communities and trying to discover a way to be accepted in a country where they are always told who they are, while still trying to retain their distinct culture can be a defining element of this new young generation. According to Crooke (2006:170), "understanding the dynamics of community will bring a greater appreciation of the formation of identity, the creation of relationships and definitions of belonging."

The complex nature of identity and the contingent relationships between museums and communities can be explored in ethnically specific museums. People have the capacity to be both Mexican American and American at the same time, therefore the problem "is the checkered history of how these identities have been manifested in civil society and exhibited in museums" (Karp 1992:28). This lack of representation and misrepresentation of Latinos in museums motivated members of the community to create a place of their own, by creating ethnically specific museums.

## **Ethnically Specific/ Community-Focused Museums**

Ethnically specific museums were originally established because marginalized groups were not represented in museums. Marginalized groups wanted a voice and wanted to make their heritage as something they can claim as their own. The social movements of the 1970s' helped fuel these conversations about misrepresentations of the 'other' between museum professionals and ultimately influenced museum practice. After World War II, Latinos in the United States became aware of their growing numbers and potential political power and sought to develop different aspects of their socio economic, political, and cultural life (Zamora 2002:324). As Herlinda Zamora highlights in her article "Identity and Community. A Look at Four Latino Museums", the Chicano movements began in the 1960's evolving from a struggle for self-determination and self-definition (Zamora 2002:324). Zamora argues that these movements brought about positive change with creative outlets, such as ethnically specific museums, to express a renewed sense of identity (Zamora 2002:324).

The question has been raised as to whether or not we need ethnically specific museums. In the article "Debating Culturally Specific Museums" Richard Kurin and – Lidia Mendoza Haunte, of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California Palace Lagon of Honor, Pamela Mays McDonald, of the Seattle Art Museum, Claudine Brown, of the Smithsonian African American Museum, Yolanda Muhammad, of the Sun Cities Art Museum, and Alma Jean Smith, with the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society - were asked to debate said argument by the Smithsonian (Kurin 1997:95-96). Kurin points out several reasons to not have more ethnically specific museums, which include: they are



separate and unequal to mainstream museums; lack of resources are restricting; energy should be reinvested into changing mainstream museums to promote solidarity of a diverse nation; and they would give limited views on culture which is too complex (Kurin 1997:97). The argument for culturally/ethnically specific museums switches the term to think of these museums more as community- focused museums (Kurin 1997:103).

Community-focused museums are necessary for the following reasons: people need to see something of themselves in museums; people need a place to preserve the history and culture of many people for the next generation; provide a locus for community involvement; help create better trained professions and audience connected programs; and to bridge differences rather than exacerbate them (Kurin 1997:107-108). Community focused museums do not threaten the broad sense of being an American nor does their existence mean that mainstream museums should not continue to strive to be more inclusive. Community focused museums add another layer of understanding into people who make up America. In these ways community focused/ ethnically specific museums can be helpful in creating a sense of social inclusion for new immigrants, the children of immigrants and native-born Latinos. However, how can community-focused museums connect to this audience with the dynamic nature of the Latino identity?

### **Museums and Latino Communities: Case Studies**

Museums are attempting to engage with the immigrant community, but what does that mean? What does that look like? In the article “Emerging Immigrant Audiences”, authors Jill Stein, Cecilia Garibay and Kathryn Wilson discuss how as with any audience it is essential to understand the perceptions, attitudes, paradigms, values, needs and

interests from an internal or emic perspective to build foundations for meaningful, relevant experiences (Garibay Stein &Wilson 2008:180). When thinking about the relationship between museums and immigrant communities, it is important to consider cultural values, use of leisure time, perceptions of learning, language issues and intergenerational differences when wanting to engage with immigrant audiences and their children (Garibay Stein &Wilson 2008:183). The immigrant experience is not a homogenous experience; individuals have various relationships to an immigrant identity based on such factors such as motivation to migrate to English level skills (Garibay Stein &Wilson 2008:180). Immigrants often straddle two or more worlds, bi-cultural and can flow relatively easily between them. All immigrants experience some degree of cultural displacement and the adaptations and compromises used can create a deeper sense of hybridity and emerging identities through aspects such as generational shifts (Garibay Stein &Wilson 2008:188). Immigrant families may experience tension between retaining cultural heritage and values and the processes of acculturation (Garibay Stein &Wilson 2008:188). Museums can aid in creating a sense of social inclusion by being committed to including immigrant voices and perspectives and by having clarity of purpose that makes sense both within the context of the community and the institution itself.

Studies of Latino attitudes towards museums have shown that Latinos are inclined to use museum exhibits as ways to teach about heritage and culture (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:20). In the article “Responsive and Accessible: How Museums are Using Research to Better Engage Diverse Cultural Communities,” from conducting 26 focus groups from Latino communities in ten cities, with participants who do not visit

museums and those who do, Cecilia Garibay outlines Latinos values that influence leisure choices and the perception of museums that are causing barriers (Garibay 2011). Garibay found three key values that influence Latino parents' leisure choices: promotes and maintains family unity, provides some benefit in addition to relaxation, and has educational merit (Garibay 2011). It was also found that Latinos were more likely to participate in activities if they perceived them as being interactive, and understood the context (content accessible, cultural relevance, and norms of behavior etc.), making them feel comfortable (Garibay 2011). Respondents perceived museums as educational places and valued that aspect, but also see them as boring, not seeing the recreational or social dimensions of a museum visit (Garibay 2011). Latinos overall found museums inaccessible due to the perceived lack of contextual knowledge, such as knowing the "basics" of visiting including understanding the accepted norms of behavior (Garibay 2011). According to a report, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History found that second-generation Latinos survey respondents have "very strong expectation that's museums should include diverse staff, bilingual interpretation, Latino perspectives and some Latino-themed content" (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:20). Many Latino museum visitors appreciate bilingual signs even though they are English speaking, because it shows that museums are inclusive and welcoming to immigrant families and non-English speakers (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:20).

I present several case studies of museums working with Latino communities where these common themes of values that influence leisure time, language, making content accessible, changing the perception of museums, community collaboration and

generational issues occur and are integrated into how museums engage with this complex community. The Mexican Museum and National Museum of Mexican Art case studies look at these institutions as a whole and are ethnically specific museums with a commitment to their Latino communities. The Nassau County Museum of Art and The Denver Art museum are cases studies at two non-ethnically specific museums focused on a specific program geared toward engaging and collaborating with the Latino community.

### **The Mexican Museum**

As mentioned previously, ethnically specific/ community-focused museums developed due to the lack of representation and the need to self-identification, from the 1970's through the 1990's. In 1975, artist Peter Rodriguez founded the Mexican Museum, located in San Francisco's Latino community, the Mission District (Zamora 2007:326). This institution is acknowledged as the first American institution devoted to Chicano and Mexican art and culture (Zamora 2007:326). The Mexican Museum has been described as a first voice institution, "It utilizes Latino cultural expression as a lens for examining parallel experiences shared by the many cultural communities that constitute the Americas" (Zamora 2007:326). The museums' philosophy stems from the understanding that a community consists of many simultaneous experiences, recognizing the heterogeneous nature of the Latino community (Zamora 2007:326). A "first voice" institution puts once marginalized voices and perspectives at the forefront of the narrative, moving away from taking on a Westernized view.

The Mexican Museum is actively moving away from a Eurocentric perspective and using a Latino cultural expression to examine experiences shared by various cultural

communities, providing a more realistic representation of the American narrative. By doing this, The Mexican Museum is aiding in making content more accessible and culturally relevant to the Latino community and is attempting to change the perception of museums, making them a more familiar place for this once alienated community. Street SmArt is one of the museum's best known programs that was developed with Mission Housing and Development Corporation, an organization that develops and manages low-to-moderate-income housing in San Francisco (Zamora 2007:326). Street SmArt serves in direct response to the scarcity of afterschool programming in the primarily Latino Mission District (Zamora 2007:326). By providing the low-income families in their community with free services through their programs such as Street SmArt, The Mexican Museum is enacting on programs that have a purpose in the community.

This collaboration with the community is essential for making lasting relationships with community organizations and community members. By actively making collaboration and community needs a priority, The Mexican Museum can aid in helping the Latino community feel socially included in their community. The Mexican Museum offers free workshops, free family Sunday series to strengthen family ties and curriculum guides that enable teachers to interpret the museums exhibitions to their students (Zamora 2007:326). The Mexican Museum adheres to the values of their community, making Sundays free for families is using leisure time to strengthen families, using activities for a broader purpose and the educational benefits, which are key values in Latino culture.

## **National Museum of Mexican Art**

The National Museum of Mexican Art (NMMA) in Chicago was founded in 1987 and was the first and only Latino museum accredited by the American Association of Museums (Tortolero 2010:83). It places education, outreach and accessibility at the center of its actions, enabling it to be a museum of arts and culture, and a serving institution (Tortolero 2010:83). Its various programs and central educational focus allows the NMMA to remain relevant and responsive to its public (Tortolero 2010:83). The museum firmly believes in the principal that all cultural groups should have a place in which they can present and preserve their unique culture for their own community and to share it with the broader community (Tortolero 2010:84). The NMMA's goals support the Latino communities' values that influence leisure time and are also actively attempting to change the Latino communities' view of museums through their central educational focus, collaboration efforts and their precedent of maintaining relevance through responsive practices with the community.

NMMA choose to open its doors in a predominantly Mexican working class community to reflect and respond to the community, have assisted Latino cultural groups with their development needs and has worked with public schools to implement culturally relevant curriculum for the classroom (Tortolero 2010:85). Community collaborations such as these can help the community feel valued through actions done by the museum, this type of action is powerful for relationship building with a historically underrepresented community. The museum offers various classes for students such as dance, music, art and video production. Parents of participating students can enroll in

English classes, computer courses and art workshops. All families have numerous ways to participate in activities and field trips at different museums and organizations in the city, assisting in the social inclusion of immigrant families and the Latino community into the larger society (Tortolero 2010:86). The NMMA is aiding families in maintaining the family unit and experiencing new parts of the city and learning new skills, adhering to the needs of the Latino community.

In 2008 NMMA presented the exhibition “A Declaration of Immigration,” exploring the issue from the perspective of an immigrant (Tortolero 2010:90). The purpose was to give the audience a way to experience and understand the immigrant perspective in a personal way as they learned about inhuman deportation, The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), globalization and the living and working conditions of immigrants (Tortolero 2010:90). The benefits of community-focused museums is being committed and connected to the community you want to serve and NMMA truly adhere to these values. NMMA understands the needs of the community and integrate them in a variety of ways, taking into consideration their specific and unique needs, understanding the heterogeneous nature of the Latino community. By having a variety of ways to interact with the community, they are making themselves accessible. The NMMA embraces community collaboration as well, to help students and teachers directly in the classroom and working with other organizations in the community to help Latinos get to know their community and feel welcomed.

### **Nassau County Museum of Art**

Located in Roslyn Harbor, NY, the community the Nassau County Museum of Art is serving has experienced a recent growth rate in its Hispanic population and the neighboring Queens is one of the most diverse areas, including many new immigrants (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:19). Recognizing the changing population, the museum partnered up with Queensborough Community College's adult literacy program for English language learners and created Culture and Literacy through Art program (CALTA) specifically for new immigrants (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:19). The museum takes this program one step further by implementing Visual Thinking Strategies, which engages adult immigrants in facilitated discussions of works of art that are readily available for decoding due to their wealth of experience to draw on as they build their vocabulary (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:19). A work of art offers multiple entry points into a conversation from description to a more complex interpretation, in a way a single written text cannot (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:19).

The CALTA program is versatile; it is used in intergenerational family activities, engaging everyone without disempowering the adults who may not have the same English proficiency as their children (Farrell and Medvedeva 2010:19). While this museum is not technically ethnically specific, it does carry the values of a community-focused museum by listening to the communities needs and providing a program that makes sense for their diversifying community. This program positions the museum as a key player in helping ease the transition of new immigrants into their communities. The program assists with language and provides an avenue for immigrant parents and first



generation children to interact and ease such a difficult part of the integration process. Through these collaborative efforts, the Nassau County Museum of Art is aiding in promoting and strengthening families in a creative and educational way. The CATLA program is innovative and is a great example of how museums can effectively reach Latino communities, comply with the needs of the community and provide a unique experience.

### **Denver Art Museum**

The Denver Art Museum (DAM) conducted in depth visitor studies using a culturally responsive paradigm, acknowledging that it is impossible to divorce a visitor's cultural background from their museum experience, which aligns with Karp's view of multiple identities (Betancourt and Salazar 2014:185). DAM used this paradigm on the Latino community and was able to develop the successful CelebrARTE program (Betancourt and Salazar 2014:195). DAM defines success as nurturing the depth of visitor engagement, offering a transformative experience where Latino audiences can feel proud of their community's cultural contribution and where diverse audiences engage with each other (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 194). Engaging in culturally responsive visitor studies can move the museum closer to new models of inclusion (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 194). DAM engaged the Latino audience to gain the internal perspective in designing the programming, making their interests and concerns the core of program. Collaborating with the community helps them feel included, wanted and creates a dialogue. Denver's Latino community has been elusive, but with more institutions trying to reach out to them the response can create a more unified community.

## **Denver's Latino Community**

As mentioned previously, Colorado has been a home to Latinos, specifically Mexicans, long before the United States obtained the Western frontier through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Mexicans had much of their land taken away and were treated as foreigners in their own/new country. It wasn't until an estimated 30 years later were they welcomed and even sought after in Colorado. Colorado's sugar beet industry had recruited German Russian immigrants as contract laborers, however this changed due to the anti-German sentiment that rose in light of World War I (Falcon 2015:30). Between 1909 and 1927 the composition of the sugar beet workforce shifted toward Mexican origin labor, with more than 30,000 Mexican workers migrating to Colorado (Falcon 2015: 30). This population was composed of Spanish Americans, tejanos, and Mexican nationals (Falcon 2015:31). The Great Depression caused for the deportation of these Mexican workers and was then sought again during the labor shortage caused by WWII. This yo-yo effect of being needed and not being needed is the common thread that runs throughout Latino history, not only in Colorado, but the U.S. as well.

The civil rights movement of the 1960's and 1970's brought social justice and human rights to the forefront of the conversation all throughout society. The Chicano movement started through the advocacy for farm workers, mainly Latino, who were experiencing horrible working conditions in the fields. The Chicano movement gained support in Colorado to try to change the working conditions of those in the sugar beet fields, organizations such as the Colorado Migrant Council and United Mexican American Students (UMAS) championed statewide and local farm issues (Esquibel

2015:17). In 1968, Guadalupe Briseno, organized the women led National Floral Workers Organization strike against the Kitayama Corporations floral operations in Brighton for better working conditions (Esquibel 2015:31).

The well-known activist, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, born in Denver to migrant sugar beet workers, symbolized the struggle for control in the urban barrios (Acuna 2011: 308). In Rodolfo Acuna’s book *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*; he describes how conditions differed in barrios such as Denver, where an identity crisis had developed after World War II (Acuna 2011:308). Gonzalez went on to form a new Denver advocacy organization called the Crusade for Justice, which operated a school, bookstore and cultural center (Acuna 2011:308). The Denver Chicano/Latino community, with the leadership of Corky Gonzalez, played a crucial role in the Chicano youth movement and setting an example for the movement as a whole. Museo de las Americas is an ethnically specific museum formed when engaging with the Latino community was not a priority for many museums in Denver. As stated in its mission, “Museo de las Americas is dedicated to educating our community through collecting, preserving, interpreting and exhibiting the diverse arts and cultures of the Americas from ancient to contemporary, through innovative exhibitions and programs.” Being committed to serving their community through collaboration and dialogical relationships, exemplifies how Museo aspires to share authority with the community they serve. Museo de las Americas adheres with the new ethics of museums and can serve as a good example to mainstream museums.

Many of these efforts for self-determination were met with police and public violence or other forms of push back. Take for example Denver's oldest neighborhood Auraria. Auraria was established in 1858 by a small group of miners (Denver Public Library, Auraria Neighborhood:2015). It is Denver's oldest neighborhood, predating the city's establishment. The neighborhood forms a rough triangle, bounded on the south by Colfax Avenue, with the South Platte River to the west and Speer Boulevard to the east, about the line of Cherry Creek converging at Confluence Park (Denver Public Library, Auraria Neighborhood:2015). By the 1920's Auraria had become a distinctly Hispanic neighborhood, made up of long-established Hispanic communities of Colorado and also new arrivals from Mexico who came to work in the sugar beet fields (Denver Public Library, Auraria Neighborhood:2015). St. Cajetan's Catholic Church was the spiritual and cultural heart of Auraria's Hispanic Community constructed in 1926 (Prendergast 2013:14). In 1965, a devastating flood put much of Auraria under water and the city took a comprehensive examination of the neighborhood to consider its urban redevelopment (Prendergast 2013:14). Despite the efforts of the residents of the Hispanic neighborhood, they were displaced to the Lincoln Park projects just south of the area, to make way for the establishment of Metropolitan State, University of Colorado and Denver Area Community College (Prendergast 2013:14). Before Denver's oldest neighborhood was completely demolished, a few of the main churches were to be preserved and Tivoli brewery (Denver Public Library, Auraria Neighborhood:2015). Before construction, in 1973 the Ninth Street Historic Park was saved and added to the National Register and declared a Denver Landmark (Denver Public Library, Auraria Neighborhood:2015). This

included the Casa Mayan restaurant, which was the first place to serve *chiles rellenos* in Denver and was a major attraction (Prendergast 2013:15). While scholarships to the colleges that were built are offered to descendants of the residents who were displaced, the great sense of home and place live on now only in the memories of the people who lost their community (Prendergast 2013:16).

Today, Denver county is currently 30% Latino and growing. According to a report done in 2014 named “Denver Immigrant Community & Neighborhood Assessment,” The U.S. Census Bureau estimates approximately 16% of Denver’s total population is foreign born. From the 64% of immigrants from Latin America, the largest population arrived from Mexico (Torres 2014:6). Despite a greater Latino presence in Denver, a historically Latino neighborhood, North Denver to the locals, has recently become gentrified and is now known as ‘The Highlands’. Once again the Latino community is being pushed out, economically this time, of their homes and neighborhood. It is for these reasons that feeling socially included with a sense of place, community and self is becoming more vital for Denver’s Latino community. Fortunately Latinos in Denver do have places to come together as a community such as the Santa Fe Arts district which includes, the La Alma Recreation Center, Su Teatro, traditional Mexican restaurant staples such as El Noa Noa and El Taco de Mexico and Museo de las Americas.

### **Museo de las Americas**

Museo de las Americas was founded in 1991 and is located in Denver on Santa Fe Dr. in the Santa Fe Arts District, which has become a huge supporter for the Latino

community in the area. It is located in what is now categorized by the city of Denver as the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Lincoln Park is a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. This community is well established due to the Lincoln Park projects being built for the max influx of Latinos moving to the area, which grew after the displacement from the Auraria neighborhood. New immigrants also make up a significant portion of the population in this area as well, Lincoln Park has 13.1% foreign born and other neighborhoods surrounding Museo are in the teen percentages as well (Torres 2014:5).

Maruquia Salazar, the education coordinator at Museo, discussed in an interview with me, that Museo's main goal is to be a community museum that focuses on addressing the specific needs of the Latino community in Denver. One reason Museo is able to achieve this goal is by practicing new museum ethics. Janet Marstine discusses in her article, "The Contingent Nature of the New Museum Ethics," three major strands of theory and practice through which museums can assert a new moral agency: social inclusion, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage; this research particularly focuses on social inclusion (Marstine 2011:1). Museo actively embraces all three throughout the museum, education programs, exhibits, collections, curators etc. Social inclusivity creates new modes of collaboration in the museum, which challenges old museum practice by sharing power and authority (Marstine 2011:3). By doing this, museum professionals share resources that "empower communities to leverage their own experiences and knowledge in co-producing" (Marstine 2011:3).

Museo practices social inclusivity in a variety of ways. They support local artists in their gift shop and showcase their art, including murals. Maruquia does tours of the

murals in the community and shares the history of the community. Museo is currently trying to make their library more accessible to the community as well. Museo also provides volunteer and internship opportunities to the youth of the community, encouraging their interests in museum professions and their Latino heritage. I find this aspect particularly intriguing because, since many Latino youth are not interested in fields (anthropology, museum education etc.) about their heritage and/or are not given support in these interests at home and it is refreshing to see a place that promotes and encourages interest in these fields. Allowing interns and volunteers to handle their collections, which is the second largest pre-Colombian collection in Colorado, displays the trust and authority Museo gives to their community.

While one of Museo's main goals is to promote and educate the community about Latino culture to empower Latinos, they make it a point in their mission statement to be inclusive of all cultures. As Richard Kurin discusses in his article "Debating Racially and Culturally Specific Museums," a critique against ethnically specific museums is, they encourage separation and inequality, and due to their limited resources, will not be able to serve their intended audience (Kurin 1997: 96). Museo is a great example against these claims. Museo provides free programming for Title One school students, such as the summer camp, which is a multidisciplinary arts camp. They promote art and creativity for the entire community to fill the void that schools have left because these types of programs are being cut. Their monthly program Spanish Happy Hour creates a safe space for members of the community to practice their Spanish no matter their fluency. Museo also makes sure programming is both in English and Spanish.

Museo presents an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere for everyone that walks through their doors or experiences their programming. While mainstream museums are making changes in the way they integrate diversity, change is slow and museums such as Museo de las Americas, can be an example that mainstream museums can follow. Museo promotes and encourages diversity, not only in the heritage that is presented, but also in the practices of the museum and how they are managed. Diversity goes further than just the museum visitor; diversity in staff and hierarchal structures is an issue as well. The fact that the executive director at Museo is a Mexican- American woman is refreshing. This is usually a rare occurrence in mainstream museums with hierarchal structures in place that discriminate against women.

Museo has gained the trust and support of the community by implementing the other two aspects of new museum ethics, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage into their community museum. Radical transparency is essential for social responsibility to work (Marstine 2011:5). Museo has placed efforts into making an outdoor classroom to commit to more community-engaged services. In order to do this, Museo needed funding, so they reached out to the community for support by being transparent about the intended use for the outside classroom. They received donations from the community and formed a partnership with an architect company to create the outdoor classroom. Disclosing issues and the reasoning behind decision-making creates a bridge of communication with everyone involved, generating trust and accountability (Marstine 2011:6). Guardianship “acknowledges both the rights and responsibilities of the museum and other owners in the care of collections’ (Marstine 2011:6). This is



relevant “not only to indigenous cultural heritage, but to all cultural heritage, tangible and intangible” (Marstine 2011:7).

Museo places an emphasis on oral traditions, an intangible heritage/culture, displaying a respect for a non-western way of transmitting knowledge. Intangible culture is a “living force that is transmitted from generation to generation,” and the use of oral traditions is a great example of how museums can implement intangible culture to make a paradigm shift from objective nature of material culture to the subjective experience of a human being (Ruggles and Silverman 2009: 2). When Maruquita explained to me the Dia De Los Muertos altar with the traditional objects, she did it with a profound respect, especially with the pre-Columbian Shaman man. The overall respect for non-western objects, tangible and intangible, demonstrates the open minded attitude that Museo has towards collaboration, community engagement, education and museum practice. Museo embraces the new era of museums and helps create a safe space for Latinos to integrate into American culture while keeping and celebrating various aspects of their Latino culture.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **Critical Museum Theory**

This research draws greatly on the new critical theory of museums, which is influenced by post-colonialism and puts its critique into practice. This shift has produced innovative ways of thinking and practice in museums. Critical museum theory problematizes Eurocentric practices that have contributed to unequal power and authority relationships in museums. Being reflexive about the Eurocentric practices that cause unequal power and authority relationships in museums has changed the direction for museums to be more inclusive of once marginalized societies. Due to this, it has influenced a shift from object focused museum practice to visitor focused museum practice. The new critical museum theory and post-colonial critique have developed our understanding of museums as “contact zones”: places where the process of transculturation have led to negotiations regarding identity, culture, and representation between museums and various constituencies (Clifford 1997: 189).

Great strides have been achieved yet; the undertones of old museology still exist. Old museology focused on the strict methods of museum practice, seeing museum professionals as the authority of knowledge and stewardship. This focused on Eurocentric practices including collection practices, exhibit practices and how other cultures were represented. New museology shifted to the theoretical critique of old museology, problematizing museum forms and behaviors that were “normalized” and “natural”. New

museology looked at the thinking and framing embedded in these practices and complicated them on purpose. Critical museum theory or critical museology took the theoretical dialogue of new museology and challenged institutions to make changes to museum practice. It consists in ongoing critical dialogue that encourages a constant self-reflective attitude between museums and their stakeholders. Critical museum theory also provides encouragement to institutions to adopt more experimental practices, value openness and transparency and support community collaboration and engagement. New museology set the ground for questioning museum practice, critical museum theory goes deeper into why and how museum practice can change. As a result of critical museum theory's calls to action to change museum practice to decolonize museums, collaboration and engagement have now become part of museum jargon. Change is difficult, but the ethical changes from within have started to show throughout museum practice and gives promise to the new era of museums.

Museums are attuned to their social responsibility to the community they serve now more than ever, embracing reflexivity and in this process, are focusing on decolonizing museums by democratizing them (Marstine 2006: 4). Janet Marstine discusses components of what she calls "the new museum ethics", through which museums can assert a new moral agency (Marstine 2011: 4). These components include: social inclusion, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage (Marstine 2011: 4). By decolonizing, museums are trying to overcome "othering" by recognizing that it is a product of colonialism. Decolonizing is another way of including communities that were once excluded (Marstine 2006: 14). Inclusivity encompasses multivocality and

multiple perspectives - feminist, indigenous, minorities, conflict and contradictions -, in these ways museums are sharing power of authority (Marstine 2006: 5). With the new supremacy of the visitor, being reflexive is essential in being sensitive to the audiences needs (Macdonald 2006: 3). Responding to the audiences needs encourages diverse groups to become active participants, making them feel included (Marstine 2006: 19). Reflexivity has enabled museums to recognize that visitors' process exhibits and objects through their own lens, which is shaped by their own unique experiences and value systems (Marstine 2006: 22).

This research will focus on the question of whether or not Museo's program, Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, truly embodies a collaborative effort, embracing democratic practices, in order to serve a larger social responsibility tied to providing social inclusion to foster identity primarily for the Latino community, but also the Denver Metro Area community they are attempting to serve. Marstine argues that by embracing new museum ethics, museum professionals share resources that "empower communities to leverage their own experiences and knowledge in co-producing", making diverse groups feel included (Marstine 2011: 7).

### **Constructivist Learning Theory**

In George Hein's article, *Museums Education*, he discusses how the constructivist conception views that "learning in the museum represents meaning-making, these meanings are mediated not only by museum objects", but also powerfully by the visitors' own culture and personal experiences and is an essential consideration when developing museum education (Hein 2008: 347). As Margaret Lindauer describes it, constructivist

learning theory “asserts that learning occurs as people actively participate in new experiences and build on the previous experiences to construct new knowledge, or ‘make meaning’ (Lindauer 2007: 307). This notion was explored in how visitors and volunteers experience Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte. Their experiences during the program including the collections in the gallery, the social interaction and the topic of the night, are all chances to make personal connections to their past experiences. This may help visitors and volunteers form identity by taking elements of the past to recreate new meaning under present circumstances. An open ended approach to exploring the experience of visitors is needed and a recognition that learning goes beyond learning facts and is not limited to what exhibitors predict (Hooper-Greenhill 2008: 367). According to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, from a constructivist approach that views knowledge as an “interpretative process that varies according to social, cultural, educational, and gendered positions” of the individual, the meaning-making processes will always be contingent, variable and fluid (Hooper-Greenhill 2008: 372-373). Hooper-Greenhill argues that, due to the contingent nature of meaning-making, constructivist philosophies are needed to create educational programs as a way to make a connection to these diverse communities (Hooper-Greenhill 2008: 373).

In Melissa’s in-depth interview I was able to intimately explore the meaning making process due to her numerous experiences volunteering at Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte. Participant observation not only helped as a sort of truth checking to Melissa’s insights, but was also a way to investigate how people who may not have experienced or may not have as much invested in the institution experienced the meaning

making process. These two pieces enabled me to capture the fluidity of the meaning making process that was occurring during Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte.

### **Collaboration Continuum**

Community collaboration and engagement are a huge cultural shift that museums are now attempting to make when including new critical museum theory. However, what does collaboration actually mean? To aid in investigating collaboration and Museo's efforts in collaborating with their community, I used Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Fergusons' article, "Collaboration Continuum". Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Fergusons' work, while framed for archaeology, can be applied to other fields such as museums. Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson embarked on this research because of the past policies and programs of colonialism, the appropriation and exploitation of one people's resources to enrich another more powerful people, much like museums (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:2). Museums are attempting to incorporate collaborative practices to share power and authority. This shift in practice produces new standards for creating and evaluating in the context of application, with greater social accountability and reflexivity (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:6). Similar to archaeology, museums have a multitude of stakeholders to take into consideration, and the community as a stakeholder is coming to the forefront of efforts due to being critical and reflexive of the past (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008: 7). Not dismissing the colonial past and consciously acknowledging it, aids in providing "a foundation for future endeavors to develop a process of embedding ethics within ever day practice" (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:6).

Defining what collaboration is can be challenging. Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson explain the simplified version as, “ people working jointly on a given project, particularly those outside of academia” (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:6). However, this simple definition to collaboration is just that, too simple. Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson develop a more comprehensive framework called the “collaboration continuum”, which characterizes collaborative efforts within archaeology practice. Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson explain this in more detail,

[c]ollaboration in practice exists on a continuum, from merely communicating research to descendant communities to genuine synergy where the contributions of community members and scholars create a positive result that could not be achieved without joining efforts. [Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:1]

The authors discuss the particular intricacies of the continuum further:

Various forms and degrees of collaboration, then can be thought as lying on a continuum: On one end lies resistance, in the middle participation; and on the other end collaboration. We propose 6 features that define these different modes, including: how goals develop, how information flows among stakeholders, how much stakeholders are involved, how support is gained among stakeholders and how the needs of stakeholders are considered. [Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008: 10]

Having various forms and degrees of collaboration is vital to understanding it and achieving it because collaboration is a practice and not a proposition (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:8). Collaboration is not one uniform idea or practice, but a range of strategies that can strive to connect museums and their communities by working together (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:1). Even though each collaboration project along the continuum is unique, it can aid museums’ move towards a

more accurate, inclusive and ethically sound practice (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008:1-2).

In Elizabeth Klarich's article, "Crafting, Community, and Collaboration: Reflections on the Ethnographic Sala Project at the Pukara Lithic Museum, Peru", is a recent example of using the evaluation of collaboration by adapting Chip Colwell-Chanthanphonh and T.J. Ferguson's framework in a museum context (Klarich 2014:1). At the Pukara Lithic Museum in Pucara, Peru, an ethnographic sala (exhibition space) was developed that focused on local craft production and its role within the agro-pastoral economy, household level and community activities (2014:1). The sala is a product of a decade-long effort by national and foreign archaeologist, anthropologist from the regional university and their students, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture, and the townspeople of Pucara (2014:2). Klarich is able to utilize the collaboration continuum to evaluate the degree of collaboration achieved in the development of this project between these various communities and academics. I will do the same and use the collaboration continuum to evaluate the degree of collaboration achieved in Museo's monthly program of Spanish Happy, turned ConnectArte beginning 2016.

### **Third Space: Providing Social Inclusion to Foster Identity**

Museums are a space for new meanings to be created (Bodo 2012:182). Museums can become "third spaces" or intercultural spaces where individuals are allowed "to cross the boundaries of belonging and are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation" (Bodo 2012:184). My observation draws directly from Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space being a liminal space where identity (self-hood singular or



communal) and culture are created in a collaborative manner by giving new meanings to the past (Bhabha 1995:206). Intercultural spaces promote intercultural dialogue, which enables a reconstruction in their meanings that can be shared in a common space of social interaction (Bodo 2012:182). The Latino community of Denver can be seen as occupying a Third Space, as they constantly live between two cultures, with identities that form something new. While non-Latinos may not live between two cultures constantly, being exposed and open to learning about other cultures in a physical third space can expand their own identities, both individual and communal, to create something new. These ideals can be portrayed through Latinos making personal connections at Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, while practicing Spanish, to the art and through social interactions with others, recognizing that the museum is a place for them. Both Latinos and non-Latinos can also experience the physical third space of the museum as a safe place where their identities can be recreated into something all their own. Being able to explore identity is a factor of the social inclusion experienced in the third space, the intercultural space.

### **Multiple Layers of Identity**

To investigate the complex concept of identity more closely, I will use several complementary theories. Ivan Karp's analysis of multiple identities will inform my understanding of identity as: personal identities being complex entities that are fashioned from community identities, as well as other identities and experiences hence visitors do not leave their cultures and identities behind when they enter a museum (Karp 1992:3). With my primary focus being on Latinos experience of Museo's program, the concept of

hybridity is an important factor to consider next when analyzing identity, which “is a difference within a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha 1995: 208). This means these individuals that straddle two different cultural identities have multiple allegiances and belongings negotiated in an intermediate space between cultures, hybridity being the intermediate or liminal space (Buciek and Juul 2008: 120). From here identity can be broken down further by using Roger Brubakers’ connotations of the ambiguous, even contradictory term “identity”, done in several clusters of less congested terms: self-understanding and social location, and commonality and connectedness (Brubaker 2004:29-47). Using these clusters will allow me to analyze and interpret identity in way that is true to its complex and contingent nature, looking at both the individual and communal self. Karp describes this as a distinction between the individual (the uniquely experienced side of the self) and the person (the socially defined aspect of the self) (Karp 1992:21).

Using the clusters to view identity helped me further unpack the experiences Melissa, long time volunteer, and the visitors are having during Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte. I took careful note of how they spoke about their experiences in terms of these clusters, self-understanding and social location and commonality and connectedness, which can give me insight into both their individual self and communal, which I have found to be fluid. The Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program provides a social space with distinct ways of potentially tapping into these clusters, with the art, the topic of the program, practicing Spanish, the food, the drinks and the social interactions. For example, self-understanding and social location can help unpack

experiences such as the intercultural dialogue occurring in this specific space and how that can open up ones understanding of themselves and others. This understanding of self can be is sparked by finding commonality and creating connectedness on an individual level helping one to feel a sense of community (or feeling a part of something bigger). Commonality and connectedness can help also unpack experiences that are at first on the very individual side such as making a personal connection to the art and finding commonality with a culture that may be different from your own.

### **The Latino Identity in the U.S.**

The Latino identity in the U.S. has changed throughout history and has been a constant struggle between inclusion and exclusion. Karen Mary Davalos explores this concept in *Exhibiting Mestizaje* by discussing how representation practices in museums work within U.S. and Mexican nationalism (Davalos 2001: 32). Through the examination of U.S. public museums it comes to light how exhibitions emerge from social, political, and economic domination and how those living under the force of domination absorb and challenge the image of the nation (Davalos 2001:32). Many of these contradictions, the opposition and accommodation to nationalistic ideologies, can be seen in museums and ethnically specific museums. Ethnically specific museums function to bring the recovered heritage and their representations into the national culture and forever change the way the nation is imagined (Davalos 2001:32). There has been a need to include the struggles of Latino people who helped create this nation. In view of the fact that Latino identity is inherently tied to struggles with inclusion, exclusion and hominization, Karp's and Burbaker's multiple layers of identity can help museums better understand the dynamic

nature of Latino identity to help create experiences that resonant. For this reason I use this approach when investigating the Latino identity.

Structural domination has fragmented the Latino population in North America. Many have repeatedly experienced displacement since the geographic dispersal caused by the United States' annexation of half of Mexico's northern frontier with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Davalos 2001:21). Arlene Davila discusses this displacement by examining the strategic way that Latinos are marketed to in the U.S. in *Latinos INC: The Marketing and Making of a People*, Latinos are promoted as a nation within a nation, with a uniquely distinct culture, ethos and language (Davila 2001:4). Such ideas allow Latinos to be recast ultimately as a foreign rather than intrinsic component of U.S. society, culture and history, making it easier to perpetuate what have become naturalized inequalities (Davila 2001:4). Latinos are seen as part of the territory, but not part of the nation. Their contributions and actual identities are downplayed in our popular culture and politics and reshaped to fit the nations needs as scapegoats, exotic entertainment, etc (Davila 2001:4). Latinos are constantly battling imposed images of themselves in a nation that cannot live with them, but cannot live without them.

Due to these factors, Latinos are lumped into a homogenous group. This homogenous perception of the Latino community, only promotes a surface level, generalized representation of Hispanidad/Latinidad (Davila 2001:14). There has been a conceptualization of a trans-Latino identity that spans, class, race and nationality. This conceptualization falls under the dominant hierarchies of class, race and nationality.

Hispanic and Latino are often used interchangeably when discussing this demographic. Hispanic was used as a term of self-designation by the Spanish-origin population in both the West and the East since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Davila 2001:15). In the West, Mexican-origin elites self identified as Hispano to mark their Spanish legacy (Davila 2001:15). In New York, which has a more diverse population from the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, Hispanic was used as a generalized pan-ethnic term (Davila 2001:15). By the 1960-1970's, the term Hispanic was seen to be contrary to the cultural nationalism that accompanied the civil rights movement. It was seen as a denial of their identity and a rejection of their indigenous and colonized roots (Davila 2001:15). The U.S. government made Hispanic a census-sanctioned category, which is a reason why many regard the term as politically sanitized terminology (Davila 2001:15). Latino is an organic term used for self-designation more connected to social struggles and activism (Davila 2001:15). While many chose to self identify as Latino both terms are equally guilty of erasing differences of a highly heterogeneous population.

Latinization is described as “the out of many, one people,” process through which Latinos/Hispanics are conceived and represented as sharing one common identity (Davila 2001:16). Latinidad is used to refer to various shared characteristics, invoking a solidarity or panlatinidad. Latinidad is the continued commodification and appropriation of Latino culture that influence definitions and representations of Hispanics or Latinos (Davila 2001:16). Many of the generalized views of Latinos can be described in this way, Latinidad. This Latinidad conceptualizes the Latino community being categorized based on language in order to contain and manage the difference in the community and create a

secure bases of commonalities and the perpetuation of “authentic” Hispanic identity (Davila 2001:16).

Many museums, for example, think that merely making programming bilingual is all that must be done to make the Latino community feel included. While having a bilingual program is a good start it is not nearly enough. Latino communities are heterogeneous, recent immigrants, tenth generation Americans, the poor, working-class families, the educated, the high school dropout, those who reject their “whiteness” and those who embrace it, all live and work in the same areas (Davalos 2001:25). Any individual may have multiple and divergent ways of representing the self, the community, the Latino culture. This directly connects to Karp’s and Brubaker’s multiple layered views on identity, the individual and the communal. Davila highlights how the conceptualizations of the Hispanic market have tended to reproduce biases toward the foreign born and Spanish dominant Hispanics; consequently the Latino or Hispanic identity of the English-dominant or U.S. born Latino is downplayed if not erased (Davila 2001:76). The Spanish dominant Hispanics are viewed as the immigrant and foreign born population who are burdens to the national community, while the bilingual, bicultural Hispanic is too complex to deal with (Davila 2001:86).

As Holmes highlights, terms and discourse are very powerful and influence how you see yourself and how others view you. He describes how Mexican is viewed as a derogatory term in certain areas and how children of Mexican decent in a small farming town in Washington refused to identify themselves as Mexican due to the negative connotations (Holmes 2013: 159). For this research used the concept of *Latinidad*, to

analyze how Latinos are experiencing their culture, in a surface level way or on a more authentic level. Due to this complexity of Latino identity, I used Karp's and Burbaker's multiple layers of identity to help unpack Latino's experiences that are associated with their Latinidad.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

The first half of the data analysis chapter will focus on how Museo staff defines their culture and community. I explore what characterizes their culture through their mission, values and goals. The purpose of this is to gain insight into the inner workings of how Museo functions as a community museum on the staff level, due to their primary interaction with the public, because what happens internally is vital to what is reflected and what takes place externally. I used how Museo defines their culture and community as a baseline to evaluate if their program, Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, truly embodies a collaborative effort embracing democratic practices from critical museum theory and if they serve a larger social responsibility tied to expanding and fostering identity for both the Latino community and the Denver Metro Area community they are attempting to serve. I did this by investigating my initial questions: if and how Museo is promoting intercultural dialogue through social inclusion for the communities they are trying to serve by means of community engagement, collaboration and programming, how are Latinos experiencing Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, if Museo's goals are reflected in the visitor experience and what is Museo promoting as an ethnically specific community museum.

The second half of the chapter dives into the evaluation and exploration of the questions presented above, through Museo's monthly program, Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte. Several different methods were used to investigate these questions



and larger themes. Staff interviews provided an examination of how Spanish Happy Hour was created and then evolved into ConnectArte. The personal experiences of a long time Spanish Happy Hour volunteer provide an emic perspective, through semi-structured interviewing, that is different from staff's, into the program. Participant observation aided in exploring the visitors' experience during the programming.

### **Museo de las Americas: An Agent of Social Change**

Museo de las Americas aims to embody their mission statement to create a culture of social responsibility to their community. Museo's mission statement is, "[T]he Museo de las Americas is dedicated to educating our community through collecting, preserving, interpreting and exhibiting the diverse arts and culture of Latin America from ancient to contemporary, through innovative exhibitions and programs" (2012-2015 Strategic Plan). In attempting to follow their mission, Museo offers their community access and exposure to Latino culture and history when there is a lack of knowledge due to the limited, Western, white narrative that mainstream/western museums in the United States tend to focus on.

When I asked staff members whom self-identify as Latinas about their feelings on being bicultural, the director of operations, Claudia Moran, and PR/Marketing Coordinator, Victoria Gonzalez, both expressed that it is vital to find a balance of integrating and living with both cultures and keeping your roots while also learning to adapt (Claudia and Victoria, personal interview, personal interviews, 10/29/15 & 10/23/15). These ideals are at the forefront of the staff's minds when engaging in their work and with visitors. When living a bicultural life, feeling socially included may be

difficult at times, especially in the current political climate of the United States. Hostile rhetoric regarding Mexicans and immigration, such as the term illegal/ illegal alien, can make it difficult to gain pride for ones identity. As a Mexican American I have experienced this, you're not "American" enough for people to fully accept you in the United States and you're not "Mexican" enough to be accepted in Mexico, so where do you belong? Promoting social inclusivity to help foster identity through the education of Latino heritage is a social responsibility that Museo is attempting to take on for their community. Former Education Director Gaby Fernandez discusses how vital it is to learn about one's culture, "[W]hen you learn about your culture, you gain pride. When you're learning about the achievements, you gain pride." (Gaby, personal interview, 2/3/16).

Museo strives to create a safe place, not only for bicultural Latinos, but also for everyone in the Denver Metro Area who may or may not be informed about the diverse Latino community. Museo attempts to encourage intercultural dialogue by creating an environment that provides an opportunity for people from different cultural backgrounds to come together to hopefully better understand one another, which will be discussed further in this chapter. "Hard topics on race do come up. Museo provides a safe space for these conversations to happen. The topics in the exhibits and workshops we have provoke these types of conversations" (Gaby, personal interview, 2/3/16). Through their mission, Museo recognizes the need for a space and resource to create intercultural dialogue in the Denver community that can lead towards social inclusivity to foster identity for both Latinos and non-Latinos.

## **Museo de las Americas' Culture**

### **Self Identity at Museo de las Americas**

Museo has a strong sense of self and their role in the community. Collections manager, Nathan Bufe, captured the essence of Museo today, “[T]o describe Museo’s identity today, I’d say it’s a small museum with a small budget, but a lot of ambition and a large impact. It’s part of the community in a very different way than a huge, well financed museum, more intimate, less formal and closer knit” (Nathan, questionnaire, June 16, 2015). Museo stands out as a unique resource to their community, providing a more intimate setting and having flexibility to try to be responsive to their community. Gaby highlights this mentality in her description of Museo’s identity as a museum, “[A] community driven and centered cultural institution that celebrates and brings awareness to Latin art and culture, in effect, advancing tolerance” (Gaby, questionnaire, June 9, 2015). Throughout my time spent at Museo, it was evident that this is a community museum, driven and influenced by whom they are serving, which will be examined further in this chapter. Gaby explains how, “[O]ur workshops and tours serve as a mirror, allowing one to see a reflection of one’s own cultural identity and community, leading to a more positive self-identity”, Museo serves to reflect their community to shed a positive light on the Latino community by highlighting Latino art and culture (Gaby, personal interview, 2/3/16).

## **Museo de las Americas Values**

Museo strives to provide services to their community mainly through their values of accessibility, education and creating a sense of *familia* (family). Community education takes on many forms at Museo such as, programming, workshops, internships, and volunteering. Maruquita expresses what Museo's unique role in the community through education entails:

Yeah that's kind of our main goal here, even with in our mission is to provide accessibility and education of the cultures here. So I mean even so fine details. For example tonight, for our Dia de los Muertos celebration we are going to do a Pre-Columbian altar, the insight to this tradition is ancient, its not just something as of now, but then also the smaller pieces to that, the pan de muerto, those smaller details that you wouldn't get at just a surface level and the connection to the pan de muerto, that exposure....I feel we kind of pride ourselves on that. Especially even in our education programming, just providing those workshops that talk about the histories and cultures that may not get spoken about...Think about why Museo was established, to get more in depth not just surface. Bigger museums try to go wider and we go deeper. [Maruquita, personal interview, 11/6/15]

As Maruquita expresses, through these different types of educational entry points Museo can provide valuable and unique learning opportunities. It's important to have

both sides of the coin. Museo can provide a richer insight into Latino art and provide a deeper contextual background compared to bigger institutions that focus on a broader, usually Western, narrative.

In order to more effectively provide accessible education to the community, Museo has a culture of *familia*, forming strong and meaningful relationships with their community. The value of *familia* is a deeply embedded cultural concept in Latino culture, family is everything, family comes first, and family is the foundation of Latino culture. In Latino culture, family is defined as a multigenerational, close-knit entity that ties you to your roots and identity. *Familia* is the concept of home, familiarity, comfort and support. As a Latina who moved to Denver from southern California and feeling the culture shock of not having an immediate Latino community or family to connect with, I felt a taste of home when I first visited Museo. That first experience drew me in. Being a part of Museo's *familia* and feeling both volunteers and visitors express this sense of comfort, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

These sentiments are reflected at Museo from its physical building to the staff. Everyone is greeted warmly and the intimate space creates a cozier more familiar feeling compared to larger institutions that can be intimidating. Maruca Salazar, the museum director and curator, has her office next to the entrance of the museum with her doors open, exemplifying her openness to the community as if you were to walk into your grandmother's' home, with an open door to greet you at the entrance. Volunteers and interns are treated with the utmost respect and the staff makes an effort to get to know

them personally. Creating an inviting environment in order to make their services more accessible is vital to Museo and creating a sense of *familia* aids in this process.

This value and concept of *familia* is important because Latinos have historically been underrepresented at museums. As mentioned previously, due to colonial and elitist roots, museums have historically not reached out to the Latino community making museums somewhat foreign to Latinos. Museum cultural norms are unfamiliar to many Latinos and Latinos may perceive museums as institutions that are not for them. Changing these perceptions is challenging, even for a community museum like Museo whose staff members try to break away from the connotations that have become socially inherent with the word “museum”. As Victoria explains:

It's important because we want to continue this idea of community. It's a process that's on going, it's embracing new members of the community from children to new up coming artists. We help artists with networking when possible and you know everyone is very encouraging saying hey you should come to this meeting or this showing to get your name out there. So it's very much this family aspect and that's very much like the Latino culture, we accept everyone as familia and we invite everyone to become part of our familia. We want to make everyone feel included. The reason why it's important is you grow up with that idea of family and as you grow older there is no reason for that to go away right. So we want to continue providing that resource for people who are moving into Denver who say I haven't found anyone, I haven't found any other Latinos. We

want to be that place where, hey we are a whole group of Latino artists, we are a whole Latino community, come in and experience a little taste of home. [Victoria, personal interview, October 23, 2015]

Museo has recognized their changing community and evolved from being created for Latinos to serving all who make up the Denver Metro Area community. This awareness helps in creating this sense of home. The familiarity for the Latino community is what creates lasting and meaningful relationships.

#### **Museo's Goals: Social Inclusion to Foster Identity**

At the core of the educational drive and fostering a culture of *familia*, is the goal to make Museo and their resources accessible to the entire community by being socially inclusive. Without being inclusive of the entire community, which includes Latinos who, historically, are not museumgoers and non-Latinos of the greater Denver Metro Area, Museo's commitment to serving their community and attempting to cultivate social change could not be fulfilled. Maruquita explains what inclusivity means for Museo further:

I don't know how others feel. But I know we strive to be inclusive and welcoming. We are Museo de las Americas, so we definitely have a focus and a mission of promoting Latino cultures but at the same time we really try and make everything very welcoming here. I mean it goes along with our ethics statement that we don't discriminate against anybody, so umm. And even, our events are to educate anyone from a level 1 person to who

may not have any knowledge of culture to somebody who is considered an expert...But I really feel even in how I present myself and what we have going on here, I really try to be open and inclusive of everybody. Our goal is to include everybody, but you never know how somebody might perceive something or interpret something...From a lot of the feedback that we get, it's that we are very welcoming and very open and nice and we try to make everything, if we have a presentation in Spanish we have a translator there for those who do not speak Spanish so they can also participate. We try to make it open for everybody, we consider that always. Even for families who are Latino who may not feel that comfortable going to cultural organizations or places because there is a language barrier or whatever or however they may feel we try and really just provide support and accessibility, accessibility really is our main goal. I hope, our goal is to be inclusive, so I really hope when people do come they feel that way, because like I said that's our goal. [Maruquita, personal interview, 11/6/15]

Creating an environment of social inclusivity to provide access to their resources is what Museo strives for everyday. Maruquita highlights the importance of creating a safe space where difficult conversations can be had. Museo aims to create intercultural dialogue to push their community to think in new ways and make connections to their own emerging identity, whether that is pride in oneself, tolerance and/or a deeper



understanding of other cultures. Maruquita asserts this in their goal to be inclusive and accessible:

[a]ll of our programming I feel like does exactly that, make Latino cultures accessible even if they are ancient...To sum it all up, I think our programming really does that and with the prices we keep things low and I feel like we really try to make things really accessible even if it's not free we keep our community in mind when even pricing programming. Sometimes we even question ourselves, 'should we, we really want them to come'. We rather have them come and experience it then not because they are afraid of a cost. [Maruquita, personal interview, 11/6/15]

These aspects create the culture of Museo; they strive to be inclusive by creating a sense of *familia* to aid in making their knowledge more accessible to foster emerging identities. Understanding whom they are serving is crucial to making an impact in their community, and one that aligns with their goals.

### **Defining Community**

Museo de las Americas is first and foremost a community museum serving mainly, but not exclusively, the Latino community of the Denver Metro Area. In order to serve their community with integrity, Museo attempts to understand who their community is, their roots and where they want to go in the future. During Claudia's interview, she briefly explained the history of Museo and how it was created out of a need in the Latino community:

Museo has been here for 25 years. It has been a part of an old Latino neighborhood in this area. This museum was created to represent the emerging Chicano groups that wanted to be represented in terms of artwork in the city of Denver because the large museums didn't even consider having Latino artists. Small Latino groups wanted to have a place to promote Latino artists. Offer a space to those groups and be able to share their culture and beliefs. [Claudia, personal interview, 10/23/15]

As mentioned previously in the background and literature review chapter, Museo was built near the predominantly Latino community who lived in the Lincoln projects due to their displacement for the Auraria campus development. The community wanted their culture reflected in their cultural institutions, so they created one for themselves. However, now that the community has developed to be more complex and Museo has also extended their services to the Non-Latino community of the Denver Metro Area as well.

The community Museo serves, mainly but not exclusively the Latino community, has a deep relationship with the ideals of maintaining and building their unique community. Victoria describes this further:

I think for the community that we are serving it is a very tight knit community and all very aware of each other and you can feel the community effort. The parents are friends and their kids are friends, so they are working on building this community and strengthening it, and

growing it and understand the importance of education and Museo just acts as a resource for arts and education. But for the remainder of the Denver Metro Area, I'm not sure they are aware that there is a huge Latino community here in Denver. Often times you hear people that move here say that it's not a very diverse city. But in reality there is quite a large Latino community here in Denver. It started as word of mouth and the location of Museo helps a lot because there is a large Latino community near here with the Lincoln projects, which are highly populated with Latinos so they all know we are here. It's just a matter of them coming to us as a resource and wanting to use us. [Victoria, personal interview, 10/23/15]

Victoria's description of the community exemplifies how Museo attempts to be in tune into what their complex community needs.

Attempting to understand their complex community is essential to serving them, aiding in creating social change and changing the perceptions of museums' roles. The definition of community for Museo has evolved from purely a cultural context to a more social context, which encompasses many facets. Inclusion and accessibility that fosters emerging identities through intercultural dialogue can be achieved with an understanding of their complex community. Museo understands this need for cultural and art focused educational opportunities for the youth of the community because their schools cannot provide it. They also understand the need to keep prices affordable in

every aspect of the museum from admission to programming for the community as a way to encourage them to attend.

Museo's comprehensive view of who their community includes also creates opportunities to create conversations around what are novel topics for many in the larger Denver Metro Area, such as the Chicano movement, local Latino street artists or immigration detention centers. Through this holistic lens, Museo strives to create a space where Latinos can connect with and embrace their cultural/bi-cultural identity, while also being visible to the larger Denver Metro community that may be non-Latino. This creates a third space, as explained in the theoretical framework chapter, where emerging identities are encouraged to grow, where bicultural individuals can connect and be accepted for their different cultures. This third space is also where others can expand their minds learning about a different culture, these new connections might encourage them to become curious about their own culture and create tolerance. This comprehensive view of their community intertwined with their mission, goals and values, has aided in Museo's conscious decisions to portray topics that stimulate difficult conversations, which will be examined in further detail in the following chapter.

Being open to listening to the community and trying to understand the community's needs from their own perspective is central in how Museo and best serve their community. Maruquita discusses this further:

Traveling isn't feasible for everyone, but we can bring cultures to the community, I think that it is important. Need to have a place that the community supports, but also supports the community back. Basics when

talking about the community, is having places the community supports and places that supports the community back. So whether it goes from the schools, the churches, the museums, the restaurants, whatever we need to support them just like they need to support us. I tell volunteers to give us feedback all the time because they are part of the community we are serving. This place is here for the community; we aren't here for anyone else. Think why Museo was established, to get more in depth not just surface level. [Maruquita, Personal Interview, 11/6/15]

In order to be a community museum one must strive to have an intimate and open relationship with the community, which can be very challenging to achieve. Connecting to the community through transparency and collaboration helps museums create meaningful resources. However, is Museo truly doing this with their community?

### **Evaluating Community Collaboration and Engagement**

Community collaboration and engagement are huge cultural shifts that museums are now attempting to make because of the influence of critical museum theory. How does a historically elite institution strive to step back from its authoritative stance and become partners with its community? What tools can museums use to determine the degree of collaboration actually achieved during the project? These questions are at the core of this research and have provided insight into how meaningful community collaboration, although difficult, can be put into practice. These challenges exist due to

historical elite boundaries set in place and it is through trial and error that museums can grow past these boundaries.

In Elizabeth Klarich’s article, “Crafting, Community, and Collaboration: Reflections on the Ethnographic Sala Project at the Pukara Lithic Museum, Peru”, she delves into the evaluation of collaboration by adapting Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson’s framework for a “collaboration continuum”, which characterizes collaborative efforts within archaeological practice (Klarich). Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson explain this in more detail,

[c]ollaboration in practice exists on a continuum, from merely communicating research to descendant communities to genuine synergy where the contributions of community members and scholars create a positive result that could not be achieved without joining efforts. [2008:1]

As shown in Table 1, there are six features to consider when determining where the project is on the continuum of practices, which are separated into three main categories: resistance, participation and collaboration (Table 1).

Table 1

<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
Goals developed in opposition	Goals developed independently	Goals developed jointly
Information is secreted	Information is disclosed	Information flows freely
No stakeholder involvement	Limited stakeholder involvement	Full stakeholder involvement
No voice for stakeholders	Some voice of the stakeholder	Full voice for stakeholder
No support is given/obtained	Support is solicited	Support is tacit

Needs of others unconsidered	Needs of most parties mostly met	Needs of all parties realized
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(Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008:11, Table 1.1 collaboration continuum)

The monthly program of Spanish Happy, turned ConnectArte beginning 2016, is where I tried to find where exactly Museo’s program exists on the collaboration continuum. The culture of the museum as well as and volunteer and audience experiences help in analyzing how Museo is interacting with community members.

**Community Perspective on Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte**

The second half of this chapter dives into the evaluation of what Museo staff characterized as the values, goals and mission of their institution and how they are actually practiced with their community, primarily through their monthly program, Spanish Happy Hour/ ConnectArte Several different methods were used to investigate this. Staff interviews provided an examination of the how Spanish Happy Hour was created and then evolved into ConnectArte. The personal experiences, divulged in interviews of a long time Spanish Happy Hour volunteer provide a unique insight into the program. Participant observation aided in exploring the visitors’ experience during the programming.

**The Creation and Evolution of Spanish Happy Hour**

Director of Operations, Claudia Moran, helped create Museo’s monthly program Spanish Happy Hour and shared the program's evolution with me. Spanish Happy hour was created in 2007 so Museo could have consistent programming and bring audiences in on a regular basis (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). A need for consistent programming came from the development of a more organized exhibition schedule.

Spanish Happy Hour then became cohesive with the exhibits. The goal of this special programming was to create a relaxing atmosphere that presented interesting cultural topics related to the exhibits and also including food and drinks for anyone to enjoy (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). The space was meant to be interactive and social, people came to practice their Spanish and meet new people while learning and having fun. The targeted age was for people in their 30's and 40's getting off work (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). Many thought Spanish Happy Hour was to learn Spanish, but it's for practicing voluntarily (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). The programming created an easy topic to potentially start conversations. The level visitors want to participate at was completely up to them, some people just come for the presentation/activity and the food and drinks (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). Others come as a group to practice Spanish or as a space to do something different. The audience that attended Spanish Happy was comprised of a variety of people (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16).

Claudia highlights how the program became more popular through word of mouth and evolved as a response to a community need (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). Spanish Happy hour transitioned to not only being related to the exhibits, but also being an open space for community members to express themselves (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). Claudia discusses an example of this:

A Cuban community member wanted a space to invite fellow Cubans and others from the community to have a night with traditional Cuban



dancing, food and drinks. We collaborated and had 150 people attend, it was a great time. [Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16]

She explains how cultural topics related to the exhibitions had been the longest trend in the program, while being an open space for the community played a smaller role (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16).

Using the table developed by Chip-Colwell Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson to evaluate the collaborative effort of a project it is evident that the creation and evolution of Spanish Happy Hour falls in the participation section of the spectrum. The first feature, how goals were developed, the goals were developed independently. Both stakeholders, Museo and their community, did not co-create the goals for this program. Museo staff, with consideration and responsive action for their communities needs, set the goals but they did not create goals jointly. However, when Museo responded to evolving into a community space and collaborated with community members to put on a Cuban night, this goal was made by the community member independently.

The second feature, information flows among stakeholders, Museo disclosed the information to their community. Museo used a top-down mode of information flow where Museo was the decision maker. Features three and four, stakeholder involvement and voice and input, was limited throughout the process, from the creation of the program to how it evolved in response to the community. Community input and needs were heard by and sought out by Museo, but the community voice stopped there and wasn't involved in the final decisions. The fifth feature, how support is gained among stakeholders, was

mainly solicited by Museo through word of mouth, promoting the programming in email blasts and through their website.

The final feature evaluates how stakeholder needs are considered for Spanish Happy Hour the needs of most parties are mostly met. The goals Museo were trying to attain through Spanish Happy Hour, relaxed, fun, social, learn something new and creating a uniquely inclusive environment that promotes intercultural dialogue, are mostly met based on volunteer and visitor feedback (which will be explored further in the following sections). The needs of the community were vague, low cost to maintain accessibility and new, exciting experiences. Neither of these was fleshed out in how these were defined by the community.

### **The Development of ConnectArte**

Museo staff decided it was time for the program to evolve again to help reflect their goals and values in a new and meaningful way in response to their changing community. Claudia explains this new direction for the program further,

Now we are in the process of redefining and rebranding the event. So the event will change for 2016, because we understand that the community changes too, evolves, so that means we have to catch up and offer new things for even younger generations. [Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16]

Claudia expresses that the reasoning for the change was they noticed their audience was no longer growing and they were trying to maintain the one they had (Claudia, personal

interview, 2/12/16). Claudia stated that this might be due to the audience no longer finding what is being offered to be exciting (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). It was decided to think about programming that was a similar format, but involved the public in the activity even more (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). They did not want to completely recreate the wheel, so it would be familiar to regulars who loved Spanish Happy Hour, but different enough to keep the audience engaged while being inviting to a new, younger part of the community as well (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16).

Spanish Happy Hour was a unique program in that people enjoyed it because of the social interactions that were encouraged and sought after by a variety of people in the community, such as practicing Spanish. Claudia highlights how the social aspect created a relationship with and within the community (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). Museo wanted to capture this sentiment of their connection becoming stronger with the community through the revamped programming (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16).

Museo wants to demonstrate,

How we are more committed with the community in doing things for them or creating programs around their needs, their desires, their interests (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). So that's when we came up with this idea of ConnectArte because it connects, you connect with the public and also arte, those two ideas coming together. It's in Spanish, but also in English, bringing the two together. So even though we aren't looking for Spanish speakers, people can still come and meet new people and talk to them in either language, and connect on similar interests [Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16]

Instead of the ideas being limited to relate to the exhibits, the ideas came from everywhere; listening to what people like, seeing what things are happening and thinking in big themes (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). ConnectArte is meant to be more hands on to create a more participatory experience. While the intentions of being connected to the community and providing a space that adheres to their interests and connects individuals in the community to each other are in the right place, the ideas are still being primarily filtered by Museo staff. There was limited input on the final say from their most important stakeholders, the community members they plan to serve.

The development and evolution of Spanish Happy Hour, while responsive to the community, was a limited type of response and was not a fully collaborative effort. In relation to the continuum, the development of ConnectArte was similar, at the participation level on the spectrum. Recreating the program was a missed opportunity for Museo to take a step further on the continuum from participation to collaboration and embody their values, goals and mission that much more.

The first feature, how goals were developed, the goals were developed independently. Museo was responsive to their audience not growing and the changing demographics of their community. However, Museo staff made the ultimate decisions on the goals for the revamped program. The goals of showcasing a deeper connection to the community and providing more exciting programming were not co-created with their community. The second feature, information flows among stakeholders, Museo disclosed the information to their community. Museo did not involve the community in the process; they used a top-down mode of information flow where Museo made the decisions.

Feature three and four, stakeholder involvement and voice/input, was limited throughout the creation and implementation process. Museo is taking ideas from everywhere, but the stakeholder voice of the community is limited. The ideas come from experiences had by Museo 's staff and are related to big themes, such as food or music (Claudia, personal interview, 2/12/16). These ideas, shaped by the staff's personal experiences, are then molded through the creative lens of Museo's staff. While the communities' voice was taken into some consideration in the process, their involvement is limited to that alone. Museums professionals' knowledge is valuable, however the community has knowledge that is just as worthy of serious consideration, especially when it comes to services that are intended for them.

Taking community voices into consideration at all is a step towards a more democratized institution, but Museo can go even further to fully collaborate with their community. Being responsive to the changing community, being aware of trends, taking measures to be inclusive, listening to what your community needs and desires, having a director who can read the pulse of the community well are all steps towards creating social change through inclusiveness and community collaboration, but it can go further. Museo can include community on the planning project for the program by having them at the table throughout each step. By doing this the community voice can be implemented in their own words and their knowledge can come forth.

The fifth feature, how support is gained among stakeholders, has been mainly solicited by Museo through word of mouth, promoting the programming in email blasts and through their website. It is too early to tell if the community supports the revamped

program. The final feature evaluates how stakeholder needs are considered. Due to the program being recently created it is too early to tell. There are efforts to incorporate new critical museum theory; to create democratization in their practices through community collaboration and engagement, however much more can be done by Museo to incorporate these practices. Having community members there at the table throughout the entire process, creating and contributing their knowledge and expertise can aid in making programming that much more relevant to the community.

If Museo can do more to incorporate community collaboration on the collaborative side of the continuum, then how well are Museo's goals really reflected in the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program?

### **Volunteer Participation**

To help analyze if Museo's goals are reflected, if a space is being created for intercultural dialogue for social inclusion through programming and community engagement and to understand how and why Latinos are experiencing Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, I spoke with a long time volunteer of the program, Melissa, who self-identified as Latina. I asked several questions to better understand her motives for volunteering, her personal experience of the programming as a volunteer and her relationship to Museo.

#### **Motives for Volunteering**

Melissa is a bilingual speech language pathologist in Denver Colorado and has been volunteering with Museo for the past three years. When I asked her what drew her interest to volunteering with Museo, she responded that she wanted to be able to speak

Spanish, so she googled “volunteer”, “Denver”, “Spanish” and Museo Spanish Happy Hour popped up (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). Being able to speak Spanish is such a main component of Melissa’s life and being able to openly express that in a space that encourages it has helped her nourish that part of her identity outside of her work environment (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). She is able to experience her Latinidad in a safe and social environment. While the Spanish speaking component was Melissa’s main motive for volunteering at Spanish Happy Hour specifically, Melissa’s eagerness to experience and learn more about topics unfamiliar to her kept her coming back, as she explains:

Well first it was the Spanish conversation, that was the number one. And then I don’t have a connection to the arts community in Denver really, so it was nice to have that, to learn more about the arts community, was cool. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

Museo’s service to their community in filling in a gap in knowledge about art and culture tied to Latino heritage is visible here.

Her interest in the topics/installations, stemming from her personal motive of wanting to learn about novel topics, is evident as Melissa describes the first time she volunteered at Museo:

Yeah, the first happy hour I ever did they had the installation of all the masks from all over Latin America and it was such a cool installation...They had it laid out, you know, kind of by country and they

had a couple of other themes. And I wanted to know why they had organized it the way they did, so that I could explain it to other people that were coming in, just because I loved it so much. That's kind of how it always was from then on with Spanish Happy hour. I would try to learn a lot about the installation, so that I could talk to other people. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

Even as a volunteer, Melissa could connect with how the art/culture was presented in a unique manner and encouraged her love for Latino culture in a novel way.

Melissa's motives are continually fueled by her experiences at Spanish happy hour, including the social aspect of the program. When I asked her what is her favorite feature about Spanish Happy Hour, what really kept her coming back over such an extended period of time, she responded,

Of course speaking Spanish, but also just the random people that would come in. I always had really cool conversations with no matter whom it was that came in. And the fact that it was a happy hour people were seeking conversation. It wasn't just like I was going to an installation or going to see someone speak, I knew that everyone that walked in that front door wanted to have a conversation about something. Because we are all trying to practice our second language, it makes it pretty fun. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]



The social atmosphere of the program is what really makes Spanish Happy Hour noteworthy for visitors, because it is intended to encourage conversations. People came to the program being very open and friendly. This openness to conversation and understanding that everyone is here to practice created this special space where intercultural dialogue can occur, is encouraged and is embraced in a fun manner. This atmosphere motivated both volunteers and the community members to continue coming back to this fun, safe, special space created by the Spanish Happy Hour program.

### **Program Experience**

Spanish Happy Hour is broken up into three main parts, 30 minute “eat, drink and converse”, the presentation/activity, and the continued “eat, drink and converse”. How the program was experienced weighed heavily on the social aspect of practicing Spanish. As Melissa exemplified previously, the fact that people were seeking to have conversations made the program fun and distinct, creating a new experience each time. With Melissa being a devoted volunteer to Spanish Happy Hour because of the experiences she has had during the program, I asked her if she saw many repeat visitors to the program.

She said that she saw many repeat visitors, some months a Spanish Speaking meet up group would have their meet up location at Museo for the Spanish Happy hour and through that group people would return on their own (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). She also saw some visitors who had just started coming on their own and there were other volunteers who were usually pretty consistent in attending the program (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). Following this, I inquired about what she

perceived was the visitors most exciting factor about the program, the topic being presented or the conversation to practice Spanish aspect, Melissa responded, “It seemed like everyone was happy to be having a conversation with someone...I remember having conversations about what was presented...[B]ut I don’t remember it being anything like I came here to see this” (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). The social experience is what grasped visitors and volunteers. By engaging the community in a distinctive way in a unique environment with goals of inclusiveness, Museo has created a safe space for visitors to participate in intercultural dialogue. A sense of community is also promoted through Spanish Happy Hour due to its intended social aspect. As Melissa highlighted previously, people came to converse and meet people to practice Spanish, she met and spoke to people in her community she may not have encountered otherwise (Melissa personal interview, 2/21/16). While the program was not truly collaborative, it still engaged the audience to participate in an activity of their choice, practicing Spanish, and providing a new experience for it each time due to engaging in conversations with new people and/or about the different topics and exhibits that was presented.

Although the main draw to Spanish Happy Hour was the encouraged social experience of practicing Spanish, once there, the exhibits aided in invigorating the visitor experience as well. Melissa explains how she also felt connected to the program because many of the installations were interesting to her (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). She describes how the Outside 303 exhibit was a “super awesome one, that the entire walls were painted by urban artists”, she had never seen something like this in a museum before (Melissa personal interview, 2/21/16). This exhibit brought something new for

Melissa and pushed the boundaries of what she had experienced in museums before. It also created an appreciation for the thriving Denver street art culture that was unfamiliar to her. Since Melissa was unfamiliar with the art world and art museums this experience helped expand her mind to what community museums are able to do and push boundaries in a meaningful way. Melissa also describes an exhibit with photographs from the early 1900's show casing tequila culture in Mexico that she thought was "cool",

It was so fun! Yeah yeah. All the borrachitos (little drunk people), I remember them on the wall where all these guys, they look so happy and they are not going to remember that night, but oh! (laughing). But you know from the teens like the nineteen's, it's so cool to see that we are still part of our culture. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

Being able to make personal connections to your cultures' past with your present is such an amazing experience. Latinos have few opportunities in museums to make these meaningful and fun connections to their culture, and Melissa was able to connect to her Latinidad through the storytelling of these photographs. The topic, drinking, was relatable but put into a whole new frame of mind as being represented as art.

The experience of the exhibits installed during the Spanish Happy Hour also captures the curiosity factor of learning and experiencing something new. Through their exhibits and programming, Museo is promoting an exploration of culture and identity. Pan-Latinidad is embraced at Museo, as they highly value inclusiveness. Melissa highlights these characteristics further,

And it was cool to learn about, like you would learn about different time periods or even different cultures of Latin America. Yeah because it's not just Mexico or not just Peru, but different parts of the Latin community. Umm, for me it was obviously the Spanish conversation, but also that this is something that I would not see anywhere else. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

Museo provided an experience that dives deeper and gets more intimate than larger institutions because it is a community museum that is in tune with portraying their goals to visitors. Creating a relaxed, fun, space where people can socialize, practice Spanish, eat and drink while learning novel topics produces new experiences for people to expand their cultural knowledge and identities. When asked what did she value from museum experiences Melissa explained,

Umm to have a different thought from anything I've thought before. See something that maybe challenges my beliefs politically or even spiritually and culturally because there were some painting that were really about mysticism, umm just like open up your mind to something outside your own experience. Umm and that's what I look for when I go to a museum. You know learn new things, but to make your neurons connect in a different way. Even just synthesizing all of your previous experience to make a different kind of connection between what you've learned in the past or maybe an experience that you've had.... [s]o it kind of also just

brings up past experiences that were really important or fun or powerful.

[Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

Museo is attempting to promote emerging identities through the encouragement of exploring personal connections to topics, exhibits and programming linked to Latino culture, like Melissa has. Melissa values expanding her identity through new knowledge presented in novel ways to make connections, as she described above, and she has found this in her numerous experiences during Spanish Happy Hour.

### **Melissa's Relationship to Museo**

The experience of the Spanish Happy Hour program, in particularly for volunteers, encompasses another vital factor, the relationship to Museo and their staff. When asked how she felt when she first approached Museo to volunteer Melissa stated that she felt very welcomed, “right away, from the first time I was there” (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). Melissa also explained how the volunteer coordinator at the time “was so sweet and she gave me a tour and just really really made me feel welcomed. So I was immediately comfortable like that very first time I volunteered” (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). This welcoming factor was another huge feature that kept Melissa coming back to volunteer, Museo's value of *familia* was evident and felt by Melissa from day one (Melissa personal interview, 2/21/16). Melissa also highlighted Museo's flexibility and respect for their volunteer's time, making her feel valued and welcomed,

They were always flexible with me and timing. Because I'm a teacher and so you know I work until at least 4 on Fridays and they would say please volunteer, please arrive at 4 and I would get there late and that was fine, they would tell me don't worry it's no big deal. We would love to have you whenever you're available. [Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

From the very beginning Melissa felt she had a positive relationship with Museo due to the values and goals the staff have, as described earlier in the chapter. The staff exemplifies their values of inclusiveness and *familia*, not only through their Spanish Happy Hour program, but also with how they treat their volunteers.

While the culture of Museo cultivates a welcoming feeling through various avenues, it also promotes a sense of safety. Melissa describes how when she was looking for a volunteer opportunity, she wanted to try something, "Totally out of my comfort zone. Like I have no idea what the art museums are in Denver. And so that was a cool way to learn about that part of the city" (Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16). I followed up by asking if Museo helped nurture that learning experience, and it did for her (Melissa personal interview, 2/21/16). Museo's inviting atmosphere, her interest in their exhibits and the social aspect of Spanish Happy Hour, helped her feel comfortable to explore art in a completely new way. Melissa was able to explore her positive emerging identity through Latino culture and art. Museo created this third space, as described in the theory

chapter, for Melissa to explore her personal and cultural identity, while exploring other's as well and being able to interact in this safe space.

The physical space of Museo played a role in creating a welcoming and safe space as well. Melissa discusses what characteristics about Museo has enticed her to choose to spend her free time at Museo over other cultural institutions,

I just love it! I just love it so much! Because of my first experience, you know my experience volunteering there, I know some of the staff, you know the staff changes, naturally. Umm and it's just this sweet little place that's not like any other place on Santa Fe for sure. Umm and like the creaky wooden floors and you know it's just like its own special little place. It's like family! It's like home! I think that it's small, you know, that it doesn't feel, umm like there isn't part of it that feels like cold or ahh I can't find the right word. You can get up so close with the art, unlike other big institutions with huge buildings with exhibit after exhibit.

[Melissa, personal interview, 2/21/16]

This feeling of family and home created by not only by the staff, but also by the characteristics of the building itself really aided in making Melissa feel safe enough to explore her identity, her new cultural knowledge and her community.

### **Visitor Participation**

To further aid in analyzing if Museo's goals are reflected, if a third space is being created encouraging social inclusion for intercultural dialogue and why and how Latinos

are experiencing Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, I conducted participant observation at three separate Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte programs. I conducted my observations during the October 2015 Spanish Happy Hour, which was a printmaking workshop and a presentation on nutrition. I also conducted an observation during the November 2015 Spanish Happy Hour, which was the Mercado de Navidad where local vendors could sell their items and visitors, could do early Christmas shopping. Finally, I conducted an observation, at the ConnectArte program in February, La Segunda Clothing Swap, where one could swap and/or donate clothes to the community. To help synthesize the data analysis, I will break up the data as I did for the volunteer interview: motives for attending, overall visitor experience of the programming and the visitor's relationship to Museo.

### **Motives for Attending**

Each Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte has its own unique twist to it, creating interesting interactions with the audience, however a few common themes for motives in attending arose that reflected Melissa's, the long time volunteer, statements. To practice Spanish in a fun environment caused many to be repeat visitors to the program. This was found across numerous visitors, both Latinos and non-Latinos. As Melissa highlighted in her interview, the desire to practice Spanish was a main motivator. During the Spanish Happy Hour on October 16, 2015 titled, Culinary Dishes of the Southwest, when speaking to several different pairs and groups with the average age in the 40's, many had attended Spanish Happy Hour before and really enjoyed coming to practice Spanish in a fun environment with something different to do (Field Notes 2015). During the Spanish



Happy Hour on November 20, 2015 titled Mercado de Navidad, it was interesting to see how the activity slightly impacted the motives of the visitors attending. While many were speaking Spanish within their pairs, groups and with vendors, when I asked what was their primary reason for attending the majority answered because they wanted to get early Christmas shopping done and this was an easy, fun way of doing it (Field Notes 2016).

The ConnectArte on February 19, 2016 titled La Segunda Clothing Swap was distinct compared to the other two events because the online meet up group had their gathering there that evening, and they meet up specifically to practice Spanish. It was the highest attended of the three programs I observed. The meet up group was very diverse. The group was composed of Latinos and Non-Latinos, men and women about evenly split, ages 21 and up, some of the older visitors in the group were I asked their age and they in their upper 50's. They were excited to be able to practice Spanish and liked doing so in new, fun environments (Field Notes 2016). When I spoke to the coordinator of the group, I asked why she chose Museo as a location for the meet up group. She responded that firstly, because it was a program designed for people to practice Spanish in a safe environment that encouraged people meeting one another (Field Notes 2016). Secondly, because the topics and installations were always changing, it was always a new experience even for those who regularly attended the meet up group (Field Notes 2016). Finally, the size of the place was not too big or too small, making it inviting to converse (Field Notes 2016). Similar sentiments about safety and the physical environment playing an impact on where to participate in the main motivator of practicing Spanish are seen here as exemplified with Melissa.

Another motivator theme that arose from my observations that mimicked Melissa's sentiments was the topic and activity and installation of the program. This motivation, the added experience of the topic and activity and installation, to attend the program came from both Latinos and Non- Latinos and across age groups. Many of the visitors' thought that programming was fun, unique and Museo always had cool art to experience since the installations rotated regularly (Field Notes 2015-2016). As mentioned previously, during the Mercado Navidad most attended to participate in the shopping experience. They wanted to support local artists, get unique gifts and have fun (Field Notes 2015). Several visitors heard about the event by word of mouth, hearing it usually from someone who volunteers at Museo or who has attended before, saying they came because it sounded fun, it was cheap and they liked the idea (Field Notes 2015-2016). The ConnectArte clothing swap had the most people attend by word of mouth due to liking the idea of donating clothes to the community, while being able to swap for other clothes (Field Notes 2016). Two Latina sisters each came with suitcases full of clothing to donate and told me they loved the idea of giving back to the community, especially since they grew up in this community (Field Notes 2016). The added social role to give back to the community by donating clothes or supporting local artists resonated with many.

Lastly, I found the social aspect of the event to be another principal motivator for Latinos and non-Latinos alike to attend the program. The social interaction that is encouraged during this program is tied to practicing Spanish, but also has its own distinct characteristics. During my observations I saw many pairs and groups that included people

who were already friends, family meeting up and individuals who had just met and the visitors had big welcoming smiles on their faces and an overall welcoming demeanor (Field Notes 2015- 2016). Due to the nature of the program, visitors who attended knew about the inherent social aspect of the program, so they came ready and willing to participate in conversation, in whatever capacity they wanted to. A group of young Latina women started their girls' night out at the program, to get drinks, catch up and talk about topics that arose from the art and the presentation (Field Notes 2015). During the Mercado Navidad a group of siblings met up to buy gifts for their parents and found this as a great opportunity to catch up (Field Notes 2015). The two Latina sisters who attended the clothing swap were delighted that their schedules allowed them to both attend so they could have a sister date (Field Notes 2016).

The visitors who attended as part of the Spanish meet up group were especially excited for the social interaction portion of the program for a variety of reasons beyond just practicing Spanish. A young man born in Mexico who had moved to the U.S. a couple of years earlier had attended the meet up group at Museo before and he wanted to use these opportunities to network (Field Notes 2016). Another young man born in India has lived in Denver for the last three years wanted to learn the other major language of the country, he thought it would be very useful to learn and this gave him a chance to meet new people (Field Notes 2016). Another young woman of Caucasian descent who studied in Spain for a few years was not from Denver and found the meet up group as a good experience to get to know different places and meet new people (Field Notes 2016). A woman, probably in her 50's, loved attending both the program and meets up group

because she had made friends and got to see them regularly (Field Notes 2016). The various social connections visitors make by attending Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte aided in creating a memorable program that diverse individuals can relate to personally.

### **Program Experience**

How visitors experienced Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte seemed to be influenced by the motivator themes. Each theme added a distinct element to the experiences, yet all seemed intricately tied together, building off one another. These motivating themes, which are also program elements, along with the distinct culture of Museo aided in creating an inclusive, identity exploring third space.

For many who attend Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, Museo has created an inclusive environment for practicing Spanish, experiencing a new topic and activity and installation and a space for social interaction. Through my observations, I encountered visitors of various ages and backgrounds who felt welcomed and safe in exploring their identity in a multitude of ways. When speaking with individuals who identified as Latino/a, practicing Spanish at Museo was a way to connect with their Latino identity or Latinidad in various ways. When I inquired visitors whom identified as Latino/a why they liked practicing Spanish I received answers such as, “I don’t want to lose it”, “So I can talk with my grandma”, “I like feeling connected to where my family is from”, “ I can practice and not feel scrutinized for not being fluent”, “It’s fun”, and “Speaking both languages is an asset and allows me to do more personally and professionally” (Field Notes 2015-2016). The examples given indicate that practicing Spanish aids Latino/a’s in

connecting with their family and the culture of their family, which is not unexpected since the value of *familia* is so vital to how Latino culture functions, as explained earlier.

This space that Museo provides through the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program gives both Latinos and Non-Latinos a chance to explore their multiple identities, a liminal third space, as explained by Homi Baba in the Theory chapter. Latinos who are bicultural can safely explore their Latinidad while still identifying with American culture and Non-Latinos can safely explore Latino culture by connecting to the Spanish language, art and culture. One white man, who identified himself to me as white, who attended Museo for the first time with the meet up group signed up for Museo's email list, because he liked how Museo rotated exhibits and the topic of the current exhibit, Detention Nation, is intense but good (Field Notes 2015-2016). He was exposed to a new topic relevant to the Latino community that he may not have encountered elsewhere. Despite the heavier topic, he felt like Museo was a safe space for him to explore Latino culture in a deeper way, expanding his own identity.

Numerous visitors attending the program engaged with the art in two ways, alone or in a group. Visitors who viewed the art alone usually went at a slower pace. Groups tended to move faster between the pieces and discussed the potential ideas behind the art, the style, use of color, personal connections inspired by the art and the casual conversation about everyday life. What was interesting about both ways of experiencing the art in this space and environment is they viewed the art several times. The smaller gallery space allowed visitors to become more familiar with the art and contemplate over certain pieces multiple times. The two Latina sisters loved viewing the art here because

of being able to get more intimate with the art, giving them more opportunities to connect with it (Field Notes 2015-2016). Visitors can experience the art more in depth, expand and explore their multiple identities.

A huge component for both Latinos and Non-Latinos who attend Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte is they feel safe. They will not be scrutinized for their lack in fluency in Spanish or not being knowledgeable in Latino art because it is specifically a learning environment, which Museo emphasizes at every level. With Museo being a smaller community museum, it can be less intimidating than a traditional art museum, which can carry an elite aspect to it. Intercultural dialogue occurred heavily because of the social inclusion and welcoming atmosphere that visitors felt. Despite the program being three hours, at least a third of the group stayed the majority of the time. This was especially true for the meet up group, which had many first timers to Museo. Many of these first timers felt comfortable and intrigued enough to stay the entire time (Field Notes 2015-2016). The social inclusion of Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte created from the culture, values and goals Museo strives to embody creates a third space for intercultural dialogue to occur, where boundaries of belonging can be crossed and “are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation” (Bodo 2012: 184).

### **Visitors’ Relationship to Museo**

The relationship to Museo was more difficult to determine through participant observations over the three programs. Overall, visitors felt welcomed, whether it was their first time attending or their fiftieth. Visitors were relaxed, laughing, smiling, conversing, walking around to look at art, eating and drinking. Those attending the

program that have come before usually knew someone on staff or volunteering personally and sometimes saw others who regularly attend whom are their friends now. Many, who attended for the first time, particularly with the meet up group, said that they felt warmly welcomed by staff, volunteers and other attendees. As mentioned earlier, a first timer to the museum felt so intrigued and welcomed by Museo he wanted to start visiting on a regular basis. Museo's culture, values and goals aids in creating a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for a diverse audience to engage in intercultural dialogue and explore their own identities through this fun program.

Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program provided an experience that dove deeper and gets more intimate than larger institutions because it is a community museum that is in tune with portraying their goals to visitors. Creating a welcoming, inclusive, relaxed, fun, space where people can socialize, practice Spanish, eat and drink while learning novel topics produces new experiences for people to expand their cultural knowledge and identities. Museo's welcoming, inclusive environment and culture encouraged people to explore their identities and want to return who had never visited before. The value of *familia* has aided in Museo achieving their goals with the Latino community and the Denver Metro Area community. The social atmosphere of the program is what really makes Spanish Happy Hour special to those who attend, because it is intended to encourage conversations. People came to the program being very open and friendly. This openness to conversation and understanding that everyone is here to practice created this special space where intercultural dialogue can occur, is encouraged and is embraced in a fun manner. This atmosphere motivated both volunteers and the

community members to continue coming back to this fun, safe, special space created by the Spanish Happy Hour program.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **The Realities of Community Collaboration and Engagement**

Community collaboration and engagement are huge cultural shifts that museums are now attempting to make when embracing critical museum theory. What does this look like for museums? This can be difficult to define due to the dynamic nature of communities and collaboration. There is no magic formula on how to create a collaborative effort because not only are communities' needs different or the program or project, but the culture of the institution itself impacts how communities experience collaboration and engagement. I used how Museo defines their culture and community as a baseline to evaluate if their program, Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, truly embodied a collaborative effort embracing democratic practices from critical museum theory and if they serve a larger social responsibility tied to social inclusion fostering identity for both the Latino community and the Denver Metro Area community they are attempting to serve.

Through this research I wanted to see a third space and collaboration in action at a community museum to learn how these two ways of practice function. I decided to use Museo as a case study and focused on one program at Museo in order to accomplish this. Spanish Happy Hour was a distinct program in Denver because of the Spanish speaking and encouraged social aspects, which is why I chose it to investigate for evidence of a

third space and collaboration. I searched for evidence of a third space and collaboration by investigating my initial questions: if and how an ethnically specific/community museum is promoting intercultural dialogue through social inclusion for the communities they are trying to serve by means of community engagement, collaboration and programming, how Latinos are experiencing Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, if Museo's goals are being reflected and what is Museo promoting as a ethnically specific community museum. From these questions I wanted to essentially discover if and how Museo's (an ethnically/community museum) Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte functioned as a "third space" through collaborative efforts; and how Latinos and the Denver community was experiencing this as visitors.

To explore these concepts the research launched into the investigation of the questions presented above. Several different methods were used to investigate these. I sent out structured questionnaires to staff asking questions regarding their goals, objectives and overall mission with their audience. I also asked questions about what identity, inclusivity and intercultural dialogue means to Museo, and how would Museo define these terms as an institution. This allowed me to gain a general understanding of how Museo staff defined the institution, defined their goals with the Latino community and how they interpreted specific concepts I was investigating in my research. This was my first step in unpacking concepts I wanted to explore in regards to critical museum theory being implemented, how identity was viewed and if Museo could be a place where a third space can exist.

Based off of the answers I received from the questionnaires, I created questions for semi-structured interviews with the staff. Staff semi- structured interviews focused on the concepts presented in the questionnaire and how they defined their culture and community. I explored what characterized their culture through their mission, values and goals. The purpose of this was to gain insight into the inner workings of how Museo functions as a community museum on the staff level, due to their primary interaction with the public, because what happens internally is vital to what is reflected and what takes place externally. Staff interviews also provided an examination of how Spanish Happy Hour was created and then evolved into ConnectArte.

The semi-structured approach allowed me to gain more in depth perspectives on complex questions about Museo's interactions with the community they are serving. The free flowing nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed me to have comfortable conversations with the staff and gave them the freedom to express themselves more extensively. Doing so aided in diving deeper into analyzing if Museo was open to critical museum theory ideas and practice through how they spoke about serving their community. These interviews also gave me insight into how Museo could create a third space based on their views on inclusivity, encouragement of intercultural dialogue and the emphases on fostering identity. It became evident that Museo could be a place where a third space could occur especially due to their value of *familia*. This value is what characterized the culture of the institution, creating a unique and impactful experience.

When interviewing Melissa, the long time volunteer of Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, I also used the semi-structured interview method. Her numerous

personal experiences provided an emic perspective, that differed from staff's, into the program. Due to her in depth experience with Museo and being a Latina, I used a semi-structured interview to help create a more open dialogue to encourage a deeper sharing of experiences. The interview focused on Melissa's motivation to volunteer, her experiences volunteering, what she valued about volunteering and her relationship with Museo. These themes from her interview aided in my analysis of several of my research questions. The themes aided in intimately exploring the meaning making process happening during Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte in what became evident is a third space where intercultural dialogue and exploration of identity was occurring. She used past experiences to connect with the art, the topic and the Spanish speaking social interactions she had during her volunteering. The themes also helped in the analysis of multiple layers of identity, specifically looking at how she experienced her Latinidad within this third space. Speaking Spanish in socially comfortable situations and making meaningful connections to the Latino art and topics supported Melissa in relating to her Latino identity in a positive way. Melissa's perspective also aided in critically evaluating what Museo staff had said about the culture of their institution, however I kept in mind the biases the volunteer may have developed about Museo as well.

To further aid in analyzing if Museo's goals are reflected, if a third space is being created to encourage social inclusion for intercultural dialogue and why and how Latinos are experiencing Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, I conducted participant observation at three separate Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte programs. Participant observation provided me with a method to explore the visitors' experience during the programming. I

decided to collect data at three separate Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte programs to give me a bigger and more diverse sample size to obtain a more accurate picture of visitor's experiences.

I utilized unstructured informal interviews during my participant observations at Spanish Happy Hour with volunteers and visitors. These interviews covered topics to uncover the Latino communities' and the Denver Metro Area communities motives to attend the program, what they liked and disliked about the program, did it connect to them on a personal level, did it make them feel closer to their community and how did they interpreted the program. I used a culturally responsive visitor studies paradigm to consider the visitor holistically and as complex as possible (Betancourt and Salazar 2014: 185). I also took into consider how visitors may be connecting to multiple layers of their identities in new ways, including their Latinidad, and how they may be expanding them through the meaning making process. Visitors made meaning in various ways by engaging with the art, the topic, the Spanish conversations, the food, and the drinks. Conducting informal interviews during the program was the most realistic tool to use to not disturb the experience of the events. I guided the conversations by asking questions, when possible, about motives to attend the program and about their experience at the program.

To aid in investigating collaboration and Museo's efforts in collaborating with their community, I used Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Fergusons' article, "Collaboration Continuum". In this framework, collaboration in practice exists on a continuum from "resistance" to "collaboration" with "participation" in between. This was

used to evaluate Museo's collaborative community efforts specifically tied to the development of the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program and whether or not more effort needs to be strategically placed to effectively create a more collaborative and engaging program. To define these different modes, the authors propose 6 features, including: how goals develop, how information flows among stakeholders, how much stakeholders are involved, how support is gained among stakeholders and how the needs of stakeholders are considered (Colwell-Chanthanphonh and Ferguson 2008: 10). Using the table developed by Chip-Colwell Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson to evaluate the collaborative effort of a project it became evident that the creation and evolution of Spanish Happy Hour falls in the participation section of the spectrum. On the participation section of the spectrum the six factors are explained as the following: goals developed independently, information is disclosed, limited stakeholder involvement, some voice of the stakeholder, support is solicited, and needs of most parties met (Colwell-Chanthaponh and Ferguson 2008:11). In relation to the continuum, the development of ConnectArte was similar, at the participation level of the spectrum.

From these findings I discovered how collaboration, community and the culture of the institution are interconnected. Collaboration in terms of critical museum theory is part of democratizing practices and sharing power and authority with the community. Museums are meant to serve their community, so the community should be given the power to help determine the services a museum offers. For museums, collaboration is working in partnership with the community to create these services and museum professionals sharing their authority. Museo is not fully sharing power and authority with

the community, as determined through evaluating the program with the collaboration continuum. However, since they fall on the participation level of the continuum and are sharing some authority and power, it is a step in the right direction towards collaboration. Recreating the program from Spanish Happy Hour to ConnectArte was a missed opportunity for Museo to take a step further on the continuum from participation to collaboration and embody their values, goals and mission that much more. When designing ConnectArte, Museo could have included community from the very beginning, having community voice every step of the way, and co-create the program from the bottom up.

Despite not collaborating with the community to the full potential, Museo is authentically engaging their community, both Latino/as and Non-Latino/as. Using Melissa's account as a volunteer and visitors interactions during the program to critically evaluate Museo's staff's interviews on whether or not their goals were being attained, demonstrated that despite not being on the "collaboration" part of the continuum, they are engaging their communities in a genuine manner. A small community museum, with a small budget, does not set its goals or develop programming using an encompassing collaboration method, but still manages to achieve good participation from a diverse constituency. Collaboration with communities should be strived for and the vital piece to aid in genuinely engaging the community is for the institution and their staff to reflect community centered values in their goals, mission and personal beliefs. A museum should not collaborate with community just for the sake of collaborating. A museum must be able, willing and ready to want to build capacity with the community first in order to

implement this shift to community focused daily practices. For these reasons, Museo's creation of the third space and achieving a participatory level on the collaboration continuum with the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program, have supported them in serving a larger social responsibility tied to social inclusion fostering identity for both the Latino community and the Denver Metro Area community.

Why is the creation of a third space important, how did it help Museo achieve a larger social impact? As mentioned earlier in this chapter, due to Melissa's numerous experiences and the experiences had by various visitors to Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte, the program is a third space in action made possible by their main underlying value of *familia*. The "third space" or intercultural space is where intercultural dialogue occurs, where individuals are allowed, "to cross the boundaries of belonging and are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation" (Bodo 2012: 184). The Third Space is a liminal space where identity- self-hood singular or communal - and culture are created in a collaborative manner by giving new meanings to the past (Bhabha 1995: 206). For intercultural dialogue and identity exploration to occur feeling safe, welcomed and included are vital factors. The safety that Museo provides for the community is made possible by the culture of Museo, specifically the value of *familia*. The community aspect of *familia* is a larger encompassing cultural concept of Museo. *Familia* translates to family in Spanish, and due to my own cultural background of identifying as Mexican American; I understand this cultural concept from an emic perspective. In many Latin American cultures, from my own specifically Mexican understanding, *familia* has the



connotations of a deep bond, a sense of inclusion, love and care beyond merely an acquaintance type of relationship.

With this value as a driving force, Museo is thinking in a community-centered way, which created a third space and aided in achieving their goals with the community (Latino and Non-Latino) during Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte. The community-centered mindset of Museo and creation of a third space was reflected in both Melissa's and the visitor's accounts of their experiences with Museo. Melissa felt comfortable and included at Museo since her first visit, adding to her motivation to keep volunteering for years because she built a relationship with them. She felt safe to engage in unfamiliar topics presented in the exhibits and converse with people she didn't know that differed from her culture. She was able to experience her Latinidad (speak Spanish, engage with Latino art and topics) in a safe and social environment. While the Spanish speaking component was Melissa's main motive for volunteering at Spanish Happy Hour specifically, Melissa's eagerness to experience and learn more about topics unfamiliar to her and to engage in fun, safe social interactions kept her coming back.

This was also true for visitors who it was their first time attending or who came to Spanish Happy Hour regularly. A huge component for both Latinos and Non-Latinos who attended Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte is they feel safe, helping build tolerance and understanding. They will not be scrutinized for their lack in fluency in Spanish or not being knowledgeable in Latino art because it is specifically a learning environment, which Museo emphasizes at every level. This space that Museo provides through the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program, gives both Latinos and Non- Latinos a

chance to explore their multiple identities, in a liminal third space. Latinos who are bicultural can safely explore their Latinidad (speaking Spanish, engaging with Latino art and topics) while still identifying with American culture. Non-Latinos can safely explore Latino culture by connecting to the Spanish language, art and culture as well, creating novel meaning making experiences. The intercultural dialogue that occurred pushed the community who attended to think in new ways and make connections to their own emerging identity, whether that is pride in oneself, tolerance or a deeper understanding of other cultures. Giving visitors and volunteers multiple ways to engage in the Spanish Happy Hour/ConnectArte program, the art, the topic, the Spanish conversations, the food and drinks, supported a safe atmosphere for a diverse community. With Museo being a smaller community museum, it can be less intimidating than a traditional art museum, which can carry an elite atmosphere to it. Intercultural dialogue occurred heavily because of the social inclusion and welcoming atmosphere that visitors felt.

Museo and the museum community at large understand they must reach out to these communities, which can be difficult. Being a second-generation Latina myself, it can be difficult to maintain pride about my own distinct culture when there is a lack in public education on the role Latino's have had in the U.S. narrative. With the demographics changing in this manner it is more important than ever to share knowledge and histories of these diverse Latino cultures to everyone. Latinos can gain a sense of pride and inclusion and others can gain an understanding of this growing population that they will interact with (Marstine 2011: 3). This can help Latinos and Non-Latinos feel more socially included, as illustrated in the data.

The major contribution of this research is bringing forth the fact there are more dimensions to engaging community than just going through the motions of the collaborative paradigm. Museums need to reflect on their collaborative efforts that emphasize the advantage to being aware of how to engage community that is not standard, going beyond 'normal' practice. This research displays the importance and value for museums to build internal capacity for community engagement and collaboration. To genuinely engage the community the institution and their staff need to reflect community centered values in their goals, mission and personal beliefs. The work must begin internally as an institution before it strives to work externally with the community. By doing trainings on inclusivity, diversity and taking the leap of doing projects with the community instead of for the community by advocates of community centered practice museums can begin to shift their way of practice. With internal capacity, museums can then focus on building long term relationships with their community by being visible to where community meets, being where community is comfortable, and by being authentic. Having a consistent presence builds the personal trust that is needed for museums to have a larger social impact with their communities. Museums need a genuine mindset of being open to community knowledge, empathize with their community and being welcoming by going above and beyond and not just go through the motions of collaboration. While resources aid in achieving community collaboration on paper, it is the conscious thoughtfulness of the community in everyday practice to create personal connections that make the true difference on the social impact an institution can have on their community.

While Museo focuses on Latin American art and primarily serve the Latino community, they are inclusive and conscious of the larger Denver Metro Area community as well. Museo is a community museum with community-centered values driving their daily practices. They have a community centered culture, embody the value of *familia*, they give their diverse community multiple choices for engagement, encourage social interactions and create a safe third space for people to make personal connections to their identities. In order to truly serve their communities, museums would greatly benefit from becoming more adaptive and open to change. Collaboration and community engagement are challenging endeavors, but every effort is a chance to learn and move forward. Other museums can learn greatly from these practices to start thinking and acting in a more community centered way.

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