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WOVEN KIN:
EXPLORING REPRESENTATION AND COLLABORATION IN NAVAJO
WEAVING EXHIBITIONS

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
Teresa M. Montoya
August 2011
Advisor: Dr. Christina Kreps

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Abstract

Following recent trends in scholarship that establish museums as complex sites where representations of Native American cultures are actively negotiated, this thesis explores the relationship between representational strategies and the employment of critical Indigenous methodologies by museum institutions in the display of Navajo weavings. A postcolonial theoretical framework is utilized to analyze six Navajo weaving exhibition installments over the past decade. Additionally, a critical reflection is offered about the development of the author's collaborative exhibition, *Na'ashjé'ii Bikq' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*, that reveals both the rewards and challenges of collaborative exhibition making between two members of the Navajo community. This study problematizes the historical process of museum representation and suggests a more nuanced investigation of the collaborative dynamics that contribute towards the decolonizing efforts in Native scholarship and museum practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Representation

“Representations of peoples, cultures, and institutions do not just happen,” asserts Richard Kurin, former director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies. Rather, “they are mediated, negotiated, and, yes, brokered through often complex processes with myriad challenges and constraints imposed by those involved, all of whom have their own histories and concerns” (Kurin 1997:13). Here, Kurin references the museological concept of “cultural brokering” that he coined and acknowledges the multifaceted nature of cultural reproduction in museum practice. Cultural brokering mediates the shifting power dynamic in relationships between those whose culture is depicted and the museum collections that hold these cultural objects. In other words, cultural brokering is a collaborative practice for it requires a reciprocal dialogue and task sharing between multiple stakeholders. The conversations resulting from such collaboration can guide cultural understanding in the appropriate treatment of objects, both in collections and on display in exhibitions. The practices surrounding collaborative stewardship have become increasingly popular topics of study in anthropological scholarship over the past twenty years—with the new museology movement, the passage of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), the proliferation of tribal

community museums, and a growing concern for Indigenous sovereignty issues and claims to cultural heritage worldwide.

In anthropology, some of these theoretical and pragmatic concerns for Native American communities have been interpreted as motivations for social change, especially with applied work in the museum field. Perspectives from Native scholars such as Beatrice Medicine, anthropologist and a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of South Dakota, have helped bridge the divide between the academy and Native communities. Medicine explains:

To me, the most important aspect of applied work is the delineation of social forces that impinge upon indigenous societies and the ways that these affect each distinctive group. Social change, and how it is understood and acted upon by Native Americans, is the crux of anthropological understanding. It is through the role of cultural broker that the lack of insight and understanding of a more powerful social order may be mediated. The fact of living in social situations of administered human relations, where decisions affecting the present and the future of Native Americans are controlled by external power components, is understandable and workable with anthropological concepts. [Medicine and Jacobs 2001:13-14]

Indeed, the reorientation of “social forces”—as in power and authority—is especially significant within Native communities where past anthropological legacies still often conjure negative memories for many individuals. Therefore, the utilization of anthropological concepts today to confront and accurately represent these historical injustices is an important undertaking, especially in museums where many objects currently housed in collections once originated from “colonial” encounters.

Building upon the concept of cultural brokering, in this thesis I further emphasize the importance of not only brokering relationships with Native community members but

also with the Native *cultural materials* that museums hold in their care. For many Native communities, these cultural materials are not just artifacts but rather viewed as embodying a living spirit. *Weaving a World: Textiles and the Navajo Way of Seeing* (Willink and Zolbrod 1996), a text that inspired my own research, perfectly exemplifies this concept. The introductory chapter includes a quote by Loretta Benally, a Navajo weaver, describing her feelings for the weavings she sold: “I wish I could see them again. They are like my children. Wherever they might be, I hope they are bringing beauty into the lives of people they are with” (Willink and Zolbrod 1996:33). To heighten the meaning of objects beyond their aesthetic or material value and understand them as a living embodiment of an individual’s inspiration, prayer, or creativity is a necessary perspective when working with and representing Native material culture. Through this understanding objects are likened to members of our family, they are our kin so to speak. It is for this reason the title of this thesis was named so.

Collaboration – A Response to the Problem

The paradigmatic shift being introduced through collaborative exhibit development thus raises fundamental questions not only about the ways that contemporary museums are repositioning themselves as they respond to the powerful currents of cultural pluralism, decolonization, and globalization, but also about the changing relationship between museums and the societies within which they operate. [Phillips 2003:155]

Despite recent trends towards collaboration, decolonization, and a growing demographic of Native museum professionals in mainstream museums, the problem of Native representation still remains a complex issue and a contentious debate. Defining the concept of collaboration has similarly proven to be a surprisingly difficult aim, even

as NAGPRA legislation, mainstream Western museums, and increasingly empowered Native communities have made it a contemporary buzzword for new museological exhibition practice and funding solicitation alike. The theory of collaboration is well intentioned, yet the ambiguity of its definitions and applications in practice means that this concept may actually work to perpetuate colonial power dynamics under the cloak of collaborative methodology. In order to understand to what extent various collaborative methodologies contribute to efforts to decolonize the museum space, in this thesis I examine how collaboration affects representational strategies through specific kinds of relationships and institutional frameworks.

Collaborative methodologies as a new museological trend entered the field in the late 1980s. Museum scholars such as Michael Ames (1992), Ivan Karp (1992), and Richard Kurin (1997) were some of the first scholars to write about the movement in their exploration of representation, authenticity, heritage, and its relation to “other” communities. More recently, Native and non-Native scholars have responded to the collaborative paradigm made popular in the United States with the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in September 2004 (Lonetree and Cobb 2008, Shannon 2009). NMAI has been the subject of both extensive critique and praise for the creation and installation of their community-curated gallery spaces—a collaboration between the museum and Native community members. In many ways the NMAI, for better or for worse, has moved to the center of national dialogue on Native exhibition practice, representation, and most famously, its methods of collaboration with “source communities” (Peers and Brown 2003). With such expansive public exposure of

its exhibitions and collaborations, the figure of the NMAI is just one of many Native institutions that represent the paradigmatic shift that Ruth Phillips references in the opening passage. Exhibitions such as *Paths of Life* at the Arizona State Museum, *Here, Now and Always* at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, *We Are! Arizona's First People* at the Heard Museum, and the Multiversity Galleries at the University of British Columbia each exemplify unique approaches to collaborative exhibition practice.

The collaborative approach as a guiding model is increasingly imperative for public museums today. However, unexamined collaborative exhibition practice is not a panacea for still existing colonial constructs. The practice of collaboration is often composed of an overlapping web of multiple organizations, governments, constituencies, and individuals. For this reason the notion of collaboration does not have a single definition. Drawing on current literature, I ask how exactly can collaboration be envisioned and achieved in a single exhibition? This study aims to unpack these *interwoven* definitions of collaboration and show how my own exhibition experience (described below) has engaged current themes and practices in the literature on museum collaboration and representation. Lastly, I explore to what degree recent shifts toward “collaboration” as a methodology address the many dilemmas of representing Native peoples and their cultural objects in museum institutions today.

Summarizing the Study

The objective, then, is not simply to criticize museums but also to attempt to locate them (and the critiques) within their social, political, and economic contexts. This is the agenda for a critical anthropology of museums. [Ames 1992:5]

During April 2010, the University of Denver Department of Anthropology hosted my masters exhibition titled, *Na'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*, that was created in collaboration with Kady himself. To a passerby, the material and stories presented in the installment may seem to be like any other exhibit on Navajo culture and weaving. However, upon closer inspection the unique perspective of one male weaver, Roy Kady, was revealed in light of conscious decisions to reject common narratives of the weaving genre. The exhibition presented the journey of one artist against the background of broader Navajo cultural traditions and anthropological inquires.

This thesis offers a critical account of the exhibition planning process from my perspective as a graduate student who also maintains relations with the Navajo community. Both the exhibition and research study are framed within the larger theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism. I ask how the process of collaboration in museum exhibitions affects representational strategies and speaks to the larger implications such processes have for critical Native self-representation as a mode of analysis. Through a survey of current Navajo weaving exhibitions and a case study of past Navajo male weaver exhibitions at the Navajo Nation Museum (in Window Rock, Arizona) and Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (in Santa Fe, New Mexico), I gained information about how these museums represented and collaborated with Navajo weavers in their exhibitions. Furthermore, I reflect on both the rewards and challenges of collaboration as an exhibition methodology through my own personal experience curating an exhibition with Roy Kady. Our collaborative process is documented and evaluated vis-

à-vis the prior exhibits in which Kady participated. By analyzing Kady's experience represented in different exhibitions, this study speaks to larger issues of the representation of any Native community or individual in museums today.

Specifically, this research project addresses the following questions:

1. How does the representation of Navajo weaving vary in different exhibitions and museum institutions? How does the literature written on Navajo weaving figure into exhibition interpretation?
2. How does the employment of collaborative methodologies effect the representation of Navajo weaving in an exhibition? How have the outcomes of those collaborations varied?
3. What does collaboration mean in exhibition practice between two members of the same tribal community with different personal goals and social networks?

Situating the Researcher

The problem with studying one's own society is alleged to be the problem of gaining enough distance. Since for the halfies, the Other is in certain ways the self, there is said to be the danger shared with indigenous anthropologists of identification and the easy slide into subjectivity. These worries suggest that the anthropologist is still defined as a being who must stand apart from the Other, even when he or she seeks explicitly to bridge the gap. [Abu-Lughod 2007:468]

Lila Abu-Lughod criticizes the notion of anthropological objectivity that has traditionally tended to privilege European male perspectives. This idea is based on the observation that feminine and/or "other" (as in, non-European) voices are less objective.

Because anthropological discourse has also tended to study both the “other” and female subjects, a researcher who studies these groups from both “within” and “outside” these established boundaries might risk “compromising” his or her results. Furthermore, Abu-Lughod points to the issue of accountability, especially for “halfies” who must answer to the academy and their communities, often with different stakes (Abu-Lughod 2007:469). The balance of multiple audiences, responsibilities, and stakeholders further complicates “halfie” anthropology.

In order to avoid the error of generalization that Abu-Lughod vehemently opposes in research, she suggests situating and writing in the “particular” (Abu-Lughod 2007:475). This means promoting transparency of personal relation to her research—a process I also mirror. I share the widely held belief in anthropology that a researcher should acknowledge his or her biases, that we all possess, in order to promote honest ethnographic work.

To begin, I am a self-described “halfie.” I am half Navajo, from my mother. I am born to Ta'néésahnii (Tangle Clan) and born for Nakai Diné (Mexican Clan). From my father I earn my Spanish last name, a mixture of Mexican and Spanish heritage, as well as German ancestry. I identify primarily as Navajo due to my sole upbringing by my mother, but also at times as an “Urban Indian,” a Latina, a photographer, a dancer, an aspiring anthropologist, or just another face in the crowd. These different identifications are often at odds with external ideas of Native “authenticity.” Sometimes I fit with these labels—often I do not. Thus, my subject position within the project is both complicated and enhanced through my Navajo community affiliation. I am simultaneously a

researcher with “insider” and “outsider” perspectives of this community and I do not pretend to wholly represent my Navajo peers’ views in any way. I provide this information because I believe it is valuable for the reader to understand my individual orientation and vested interest in the research project—as it is important for any researcher to lay out the personal and theoretical perspectives he or she brings to their work.

Specifically, my subject position within the Navajo community facilitated my entry into the Navajo weaver network with greater ease due to kinship identification. My clan identity situated my position within this network and allowed me to initially establish a relationship with Navajo weaver Roy Kady not seen in other examples of museum collaboration. However, I acknowledge that shared tribal identity does not presume a successful collaborative experience. The literature has revealed that each collaborative project brings its own set of challenges and lessons to be learned. In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I explain the complexity of negotiating two distinct identities in the exhibition project that revealed our collaboration not only as an ideal methodology, but also as an original site for critical ethnographic analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Postcolonial Critique

Colonialism broadly refers to the establishment, act, or process of defining and acquiring new territory for the dominant society. In colonial contexts, the exploitation of local resources, economy, and communities manifests in innumerable forms. Although many scholars following in the tradition of Karl Marx argue that colonialism has always existed in some form, a very particular postcapitalist colonialism (or modern colonialism) is where postcolonial scholars focus their critique. More specifically, colonialism tends to refer to the western domination over non-western nations and regions. In the background section (Chapter 3) of this thesis I will focus primarily on the effects of settler colonialism. Here, the broader discourse on colonialism and postcolonialism as a global phenomenon is useful to frame my research.

Ania Loomba, a postcolonial feminist scholar, describes colonialism as follows:

Modern colonialism did more than exact tribute, goods, and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between the colonized and colonial countries . . . in whichever direction human beings and materials traveled, the profits always flowed back into the so-called ‘mother country.’
[Loomba 1998:4]

The cross-cultural commonality of this process is an inherent division of power between the colonizer and the colonized, enforced by the former. The recognition of this

dichotomy forms the basic tenets of postcolonial discourse. The process of *decolonization* is the active intention and process of subversion of this power dynamic.¹ Put another way, postcolonialism is a lens to interpret the current world as a product of the colonial experience.

As a field, postcolonialism rose to prominence in the late 1970s. Many cite the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* as the birth of this multidisciplinary movement. Gayatri Spivak notes,

Said's book was not a study of marginality, nor even of marginalization. It was the study of the construction of an object, for investigation and control. The study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said's, has, however blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. [Spivak 1993:53]

The importance of the "other" voice is a crucial element, even necessity, of postcolonial discourse.

The raw zeal and immediacy of Frantz Fanon in his seminal manifestos of anti-colonial thought, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and later, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) set the stage for postcolonial dialogue before Said. Growing up as the black "other" in the French colony of Martinique and later fighting alongside the French in World War I made the issue of race relations an acute and highly visible topic for the young Fanon. He describes the process of "colonizing the mind" and how through the "struggle for liberation, when the colonized intellectual touches base again with his people, this artificial sentinel [referring to Western values] is smashed to smithereens"

¹ United Nations Resolution 1514, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, was an important milestone in the process of decolonization that passed on December 14, 1960 by the U.N. General Assembly. This act formally acknowledged decolonization as a human rights issue, implicitly admitting that the act of colonialism encroached on the rights of individuals subject or formerly subject to colonial rule. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007.

(Fanon 1961:11). His rally for decolonization not only refers to a physical, and often violent, altercation but a mental one as well.

Likewise, the notion of postcoloniality has been used to demarcate the physical and mental places where the colonial legacy continues to shape and affect formerly colonized subjectivities and relationships—and more importantly, highlight the endeavors to move beyond the colonial legacy. Robert Young, a critical theory scholar, states,

For much of postcolonial theory is not so much about static ideas or practices, as about the relations between ideas and practices: relations of harmony, relations of conflict, generative relations between different peoples and their cultures. Postcolonialism is about a changing world, a world that has been changed by struggle and which its practitioners intend to change further. [Young 2003:7]

It is on this new plane (of change) where the formally colonized subjects gain traction in their ability to redefine power structures, unequal relationships, and in many ways, a proclamation of sovereignty of previously held, and even new ideas and practices. It demands a new scope of thinking, not just for ourselves, but also for the entire field as postcolonial thought also redefines standards of ethics and methodologies:

There is a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality—as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms—transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside objects d’art or beyond the canonization of the ‘idea’ of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and values, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival. [Bhabha 1994:247]

On the topic of colonial/colonized relations, some have argued that the very definition of the “other” is inextricably linked to the one who judges the “other.” It is an outside-inwardly influenced definition rather than an insider-outwardly defined narrative.

Jean Paul Sartre, the French philosopher, describes this divisive concept in the wake of the French liberation from German occupation in his piece *Anti-Semite and Jew* saying, “The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start . . . It is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew” (Sartre 1948:69). Likewise, definitions of the “other” were based upon the representations created by the western on-looker. Timothy Mitchell (1988), in his book *Colonising Egypt*, writes extensively on the spectacle of “otherness” created by the French in their creation of Egyptian exhibition venues. But the allure of the exotic “other” in fairs, exhibitions, and shows was widespread throughout the European continent throughout the colonial era of the 19th century. Mitchell explains, “Spectacles like the world exhibition and the Orientalist congress set up the world as picture. They ordered it up before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, experienced and investigated” (Mitchell 1988:6). Mitchell further describes how at the Ninth International Congress in London (1892) the inaugural address introduced the display as charting “the historical development of the human race” (1988:6). The social evolutionary language inherent in the exhibitions perpetuated a European sentiment of superiority, where the Western observer was placed at the pinnacle in the visual timeline of civilization. Furthermore, the West was made to be seen as positive, civil, and just while everything the opposite—the negative, savage, barbaric—was epitomized in the “other.”

Said recognizes this dichotomy when he writes, “Consider how the Orient, and in particular the Near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite” (Said 1978:58). This oversimplification of “otherness” as the negation of

anything deemed to be of Western origin makes the process of representation an abstraction of reality—of both the observer and the observed.

The invented binary of the observer and the “other” not only divided the two into different planes of physical space but also created a parallel of two separate temporal spaces as Mitchell explains,

The remarkable realism of such displays made a strange civilization unto an object the visitor could almost touch. Yet to the observing eye, surrounded by the display but distinguished from it by the status of visitor, it remained a mere representation, the picture of some strange reality. Thus there were, in fact, two parallel pairs of distinctions, between the exhibit, and between the exhibit and what it expressed. The representation was set apart from the real political reality it claimed to portray, as the observing mind was set apart from it observed. [Mitchell 1988:9]

Thus, the problem of representation is complicated by multiple temporal and physical planes that were often controlled by the Western observer and perpetuated in a cyclical reformulation of misrepresentations through museum exhibitions. Challenges to this power dynamic by “othered” individuals forms part of the foundation of postcolonial scholarship. I explain how this process has played out in the museum venue in the following section where I discuss the museological problem of representation.

The problem of linear time complicates notions of identity and how one should exist across these multiple temporal landscapes. Achille Mbembe speaks about the Western negation of African-ness and attempts to relocate it in the postcolonial experience. He explains, “To secure emancipation and recognition, they thought, required the production of an apologetic discourse based on rediscovery of what was supposed to be the essence, the distinctive genius, of the black ‘race’”(Mbembe 2001:12). This same concept is applicable to Native American issues surrounding identity, sovereignty, and

representation because of the experience of settler colonialism in North America. While there exists no true “essence” of any “race,” the representation of Native people in museum exhibitions is complicated by this very notion of cultural loss and reclaiming a “true and authentic” culture. The following passages describe some of the overarching problems of representation that arose out of the colonial experience.

The Politics of Representation in the Museum Venue

Numerous factors contribute to the broad changes in the museum field over the past 30 years since the dawn of “new museology.” This concept was developed through various International Council of Museums (ICOM) meetings that eventually culminated in the establishment of the International Movement for a New Museology (MINOM) in Lisboa, Portugal in 1985. However, this movement’s founding precepts were formulated one year prior at the Ecomuseums / New Museology Workshop in Quebec (Canada) in 1984 with the adoption of The Quebec Declaration that redefined how museologists conceptualized traditional museum roles and attitudes. Furthermore, Christina Kreps, a Museum Anthropologist, notes, “One of the aims of the movement has been to challenge conventional notions of museum definition and practice, and to widen the museum concept to embrace a variety of forms and meanings” (Kreps 2003:9). The widespread effect of the movement encouraged greater participation of underrepresented demographics such as Native groups. This museum recognition coincided with tribal-driven efforts to establish cultural centers and advance legitimate claims toward cultural property and heritage housed in museum collections. A few examples of well-established

tribal museums include: the Zuni A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center (a non-profit center founded in 1992), the Navajo Nation Museum (founded in 1997), the Suquamish Museum and Cultural Center (founded in 1983), Oneida Nation Museum, and Agua Caliente Cultural Museum (a non-profit museum founded in 1991).

Globally, the colonial legacy of the museum collection enterprise is undoubtedly still potent and, as such, museum institutions consequently have been greatly affected by the rise of the postcolonial mindset and discourse:

Following the end of conflict in Europe, attention turned to political issues in Africa and Asia where peoples were fighting for political and cultural autonomy and demanding independence. The determination to end centuries of colonial rule and exploitation in these countries was echoed by the political awakening of indigenous peoples and cultural minority groups. [Simpson 1996:7]

The United States also experienced a cultural revolution that began during the 1960s civil rights era. Issues concerning Native sovereignty came to the fore and raised questions about the pervasive colonial influence in many social structures such as museums. Anticolonial and postcolonial sentiment by Native people along with other minority groups eventually translated these misgivings into museum-focused critiques in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* by Moira G. Simpson (1996).

An obvious critique was the problem of presenting objects from cultures of the “other.” Within the field of “new museology” a plethora of literature relating to ethical standards, curatorial authority, conservation, and education has been published. Within this section, I will focus primarily on examples that relate to the representation of Indigenous peoples.

For purposes of clarity, I have identified four main subjects within the realm of museum literature on representation that help situate my study of Navajo weaving exhibitions: the problem of authority, the problem of the object and meaning-making, the problem of time, and the problem of authenticity. While all of these classifications are inherently inter-related, each category speaks to a particular aspect of the broad problem of representation.

I would like to frame the following passages with a quote from *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, a well-composed anthology of essays concerning museological representation in the postcolonial moment:

Objects have not a single past but an unbroken sequence of past times leading backward from the present moment. Moreover, there is no ideal spot on the temporal continuum that inherently deserves emphasis . . . In elevating or admiring one piece of the past, we tend to ignore and devalue others. One reality lives at the expense of countless others. [Karp and Levine 1991:160]

This quote encompasses each of the four problems I identified, once again demonstrating their overlapping relationship. The social evolutionary underpinnings of founding museum collections—that arranged objects in a linear progression from “the primitive to the civilized”—was challenged when the creators of these objects began to come forward and claim their cultures were still thriving in ways outside the established temporal space. Furthermore, when the objects were originally collected in the colonial era they remained trapped in the colonial space; thus their meaning was inherently constructed according to colonial precepts. Through this process values were assigned and reinforced. Stories were imagined and histories were silenced. As Native American sovereignty became more

visible and recognized in the United States, the museum venue has become just one of several areas where cultural authority is being asserted and reclaimed.

The Problem of Authority

Until recently, Indigenous peoples (as the formerly colonized “other”) have held little power in the representation of their cultural objects in museums. While the disintegration of colonial rule in the United States gave way to movements of Native sovereignty on the political stage, some of the cultural objects that were obtained—both through salvage methods and legal sale—by anthropologists and collectors in prior eras were still being housed in museum collections.

Moira Simpson explains that being “the subject of extensive anthropological research and the prey of voracious collectors, American Indians have been unequal partners in a relationship from which they have benefited little” (Simpson 1996:135). Prior to the redefinition of museum methodology introduced through the new museological paradigm the relationship between museums and Native people was minimal. Without having direct control over cultural material, museums were free to interpret Native material according to their own classifications, and curatorial authority has often been intrinsically linked to meaning production:

Meanings are always constructed within social relationships, and social relationships are always enmeshed in power networks. The meanings that are most likely to be publicly upheld are likely to be approved by those who hold the most power. But this does not mean that dominant meanings are always found. The struggle over meaning is ongoing. [Hooper-Greenhill 2000:50]

Hooper-Greenhill's perspective seems to mirror Michel Foucault's (1969) concept of *énoncé* (meaning "that which is enunciated") where statements in and of themselves do not carry meaning, but rather within the context of particular social networks, meanings are derived. In this way, authority (as those who hold power over cultural objects) dictates narratives of meaning for the objects, which thereby reinforces the hierarchy in the established power network of museum institutions.

Other scholars such as Tony Bennett (2004), Timothy Luke (2002) and Michelle Henning (2006) also use Foucault's framework in their analyses in regards to power relations. Through this theoretical framework museums were defined as the sites of knowledge production, classification, and authentication. Thus, Native cultural objects were assigned Western notions of value and categorized accordingly. The act of "seeing" is a culturally constructed practice.

Furthermore, the ability "to see" carries authoritative weight. By being observed implies less authority, or the ability to be the observer (with the choice to see and observe). The act of observing also leads to value judgments and consequently, the construction of meaning. Hooper-Greenhill adds,

Looking is not commonly understood as a complex matter. Generally, vision is treated as autonomous, free, and pure. However, looking is not a simple matter, and seeing is related both to what is known and to what counts as available to be observed. What is seen depends on who is looking, at what, in which site. Seeing is relative rather than absolute. [Hooper-Greenhill 2000:15]

In this way, Hooper-Greenhill's observation follows Foucault's theories, specifically his concept about the *panopticon*.² Although literally a physical structure, Foucault used the *panopticon* as a metaphor for the modern Western power of influence over its subjects. "The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body . . . its vocation was to become a generalized function" (Foucault 1977:207). Extending this notion to the "exhibitionary complex" (Bennett 1994), Western museums hold a certain "panoptic" authority that the general public assumes is always correct and valid. This is the fundamental problem in exhibiting "the other;" namely Native American cultures as interpreted by non-Native institutions. Furthermore, text panels in museum exhibitions may not always be questioned as being the opinion of a curator or a team of researchers; the information often is accepted as the definitive "Truth." However, Native communities and the new museum model they have created for themselves has greatly challenged all of these problems over the past couple decades.

In *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* Moira Simpson (1996) explores the ways in which museums have responded to pressures by Native groups to redefine policies and treatment of their cultural material. She notes,

In Europe, as in North America, Australia and New Zealand, the plurality of contemporary, post-colonial society gives rise to complex issues in relation to museums: display and interpretation; the classification and values attached to objects; cultural bias in representing other cultures; the

² The *panopticon* was a concept originally introduced by English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, in 1791 when he devised a schematic for a prison complex that included a central tower that allowed the observer within to observe all prisoners without their knowledge. In theory, the observer need not be present for the prisoners to believe they were under constant surveillance and thus would always behave as if they were being watched. (McHoul and Grace: 1993)

lack of representation of cultural diversity in local history collections; demands for self-representation and self-expression. [Simpson 1996:2]

The recognition of these issues has resulted in the establishment of new museum relationships and most importantly, the creation of Native-run museum institutions and community centers. The later is especially significant because it signals a Native derived authority that not only challenges traditional Western museum perspectives but also inverts the power dynamic of Native culture and material being engaged through outside sources towards community ownership and interpretation.

Several other authors have written about these adaptations and its significance in the postcolonial moment (Ames 1992, Phillips and Steiner 1999, West 2000, Kreps 2003, Peers and Brown 2003, Coody Cooper 2008, Lonetree and Cobb 2008, Sleeper-Smith 2009). Most notable are the twin volume publications, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Karp and Lavine, 1991) and *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public* (Karp, et al. 1992). In the former, Patrick Houlihan writes in his essay, “The Poetic Image and Native American Art,” a suggestion for museums to adopt display practices from their tribal museum counterparts. He writes: “Here it may be presumed that Native American control and direction are most directly in operation and that exhibitions reflect an insider’s interpretation of that culture, art, and history” (Houlihan 1991:205-206). Houlihan’s truism reflects a period of time when mainstream museums were just beginning to reconsider their relationships with Native communities. Meanwhile, many tribal and Native museum institutions had been working towards cultural sovereignty mostly out of view of the public eye. Literally, sovereignty refers to supreme authority or the legal right to govern oneself. The addition of the word

cultural to this phrase refers more specifically to either the pan-Native American cause to assert cultural distinction and self-identity. It also refers to tribal rights to assert control over land, resources, and heritage—both tangible and intangible.

As Ira Jacknis notes in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, there are currently over two hundred tribal institutions in the United States, the first being the Cherokee tribal museum in 1828 while most other tribal museums have been founded since the 1960s (Jacknis 2008:31). Since opening in September 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. has represented a voice of authority on behalf of Native peoples in the United States. “In some ways, one may view the NMAI as a kind of national tribal museum . . . many, in fact, avoid the term ‘museum’ in favor of ‘cultural center,’ implying a broader scope that goes beyond the collection and display of artifacts” (Lonetree and Cobb 2008:31). The fact that Native communities dictate the title and definitions of their institutions reinforces a new standard of authority not seen even in first half of the latter century and certainly not a prominent recognition among mainstream museums until the early 1990s. While many Native communities have asserted greater control over their cultural objects through their own institutions, many more changes need to occur in the mainstream museum venue.

The Problem of Object and Meaning-Making

Native American cultural objects have been boundlessly redefined and re-contextualized in myriad ways and contexts. Debates surrounding their appropriate venue

of display have occurred ever since Western museums first collected and acquired them. The two main categories of display (and consequently, method of interpretation) are: the art gallery or anthropology/natural history museum. Earlier representations of Native American cultural objects depicted them as ethnographic artifacts in timeless diorama displays or as specimens to be categorized and compared against other cultural objects.

As James Clifford describes,

But generally speaking, the ethnographic museum and the art museum have developed fundamentally different modes of classification. In the former, a work of ‘sculpture’ is displayed along with other objects of similar function or in proximity to objects from the same cultural group, including utilitarian artifacts (spoons, bowls, spears, etc.). A mask or statue may be grouped with formally dissimilar objects and explained as part of a ritual or institutional complex. The names of individual sculptors are unknown, or suppressed. In the art museum a sculpture is identified as the creation of an individual. Its place in everyday cultural practices (including the market) is irrelevant to its essential meaning. Whereas in the ethnographic museum the object is culturally or humanly ‘interesting,’ in the art museum it is primarily ‘beautiful’ or ‘original.’ [Clifford 1985:242]

The debate over art and anthropology continues today. Natural history museums that display Native American objects have often been known to present artifacts grouped according to geographic area—many have changed this manner of display and many others maintain the culture area classification system. This style of presentation is flawed on the basis that it presumes that cultural characteristics are solely defined by environmental influences or geographic location and that other cultures within that same region share those same characteristics. Richard Hill, member of the Tuscarora nation and former deputy director of public programs at the NMAI, has written extensively on issues pertaining to Native Americans and museum practices. He notes, “no academic

notion has more affected mainstream perceptions of Native Americans than the separation of people into culture regions (Hill 2000:42). While it may be true that certain similarities exist between neighboring tribes, the presumption that “plains” tribes are any more similar to each other than “southeast” tribes is problematic given that many tribes were forcibly relocated during the 1800s. Even this historic tragedy aside, cultural area categorization can easily lead to stereotypes. Following this model of organization in the museum venue, popular methods of display have included dioramas—still very much in existence at the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois or the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) for instance—and heritage site re-enactments such as Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Despite the arguments that can be made against these methods of display Hill acknowledges the efforts that the Denver Art Museum (DAM) and the DMNS *have* made in their attempts to heighten aesthetic appreciation and cultural understanding through displays that challenge common stereotypes about Native Americans. One example that Hill describes is the inclusion of trash in the Miccosuki diorama in the DMNS Crane Hall that dispels the cliché of the Native American as the “ultimate environmentalist” (Hill 2000:44).

While ethnographic/natural history exhibitions of Native American objects and culture often frame them within their particular cultural contexts (with images, maps, historical explanations in text panels, etc.) the tendency towards minimal information that is typically presented in art museum labels may not always provide enough information about the lives of contemporary Native people today.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) outlines two types of representational strategies, *in situ* and *in context*. *In situ* displays utilize a metonymy-style of representation; that is a substitution that “accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:19). On the other hand, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes how *in context* display approaches establish,

... a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, provide historical background, make comparisons, pose questions, and sometimes even extend to the circumstances of excavation, collection, and conservation of the objects on display. There are as many contexts for an object as there are interpretive strategies. [Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:21]

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett problematizes the interpretive role of museum institutions in the meanings assigned to objects on display in exhibitions. Thus, the display of objects is always a subjective exercise. Timothy Luke describes the problem of objectivity in museum exhibitions:

Every museum tries to present an artful display of artifacts and ideas to entertain and educate its visitors. At the same time, it also is a materialized ideological narrative, fabricating its own focalized normative code of practices and values out of peculiarly arranged displays with historical artifacts, corporate products, natural organisms, technological devices, or art works. While their public pose most frequently is one of cool detached objectivity, museums are unavoidably enterprises organized around engaged partisan principles. [Luke 2002:228]

Through the display of certain Native objects in a certain order and within the frame of a certain narrative, the visitor derives meaning about the culture as such. Luke highlights a crucial point in this process, that ultimately these constructed metanarratives underlie particular moral values and political perspectives of the museum institution or even the greater society that is representing the “other” (which probably do not coincide with the praxis of the culture being represented). He reduces the exhibition exercise to a very

subjective practice and offers little hope that any museum could move beyond its own “partisan principles.”

Displays of Native culture within art museums tend to be more apt to include contemporary Native artists (solving the problem of “ethnographic present” presentation) however; too much emphasis may be placed on aesthetic qualities and less attention paid to cultural context. Thus, the meaning of Native objects in the art museum is more simplified— for better or for worse. Rick West, founding director of NMAI, describes this conundrum,

In representing the material, however, it is not sufficient, in the end, to treat it only as ‘art,’ because we miss so much in doing so. A person can stand in awe, for example, of a pot created by Popovi Da, the brilliant ceramicist, for its beauty as ‘art,’ but if he does not know the linkage between Popovi Da’s worldview and community and his personal creative spirit, the meaning of the pot to the Popovi Da and the people of San Ildefonso is incomplete—and it can be made complete only by honoring the place of that nexus in defining the meaning of the object. [West 2004:9]

Therefore, a balance must be struck between the aesthetic appreciation that art gallery display can offer and the cultural context that ethnographic displays attempt to convey. Ultimately, a more appropriate way to interpret object meaning lies with the Native communities and artists themselves. The exhibition, *Intersections: Native American Art in a New Light* at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (on display from June 24, 2006 to December 31, 2011) juxtaposes modern and historical pieces with interpretation provided by the artists themselves where possible (such as quotes by California Native artist Judith Lowry on her painting object label). Furthermore, Nora Naranjo-Morse, Santa Clara Pueblo artist, created an in-gallery installation and served as

a curatorial consultant for the exhibition. The meanings prescribed to the objects in this exhibition were more likely to have been interpreted appropriately because the artists were consulted in their interpretation.

In his essay, *Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects*, Michel Baxandall discusses the problem of assigning object meaning,

The objects or artifacts least likely to cause misunderstanding between viewer and maker are objects *intended* for exhibition. I mean that objects designed to be looked at for their visual interest are those that properly can be displayed and examined for their visual interest. A viewer looking at an artifact that is not designed for looking but that is exhibited as culturally interesting, culturally telling, or indicative of cultural or technical level is hard put not to be a voyeur intrusive and often embarrassed... In other words, there seems to me to be an issue of exhibitability. The exhibitable object is one made for visual exhibition or display. The viewer may indeed bring inappropriate concepts and standards to his examination of it (and this something that exhibitor can do something about), but the visual curiosity itself will not be improper. [Baxandall 1991:39-40]

Baxandall raises an important issue about intention. There are still thousands of native objects currently in museums that would be culturally inappropriate to display, such as ceremonial items. This may be due to lack of cultural reference (the museum does not know that the object's use or meaning) or perhaps even negligence because the museum technically does not have to honor a belief system that precludes certain objects from being displayed in front of certain genders or individuals without the appropriate cultural knowledge or status to view such objects. An institution that knowingly presents these types of objects or does not choose to consult with Native people in their exhibition ventures arguably has unacceptable intentions and museum ethics. However, as Baxandall explains, certain objects are made for viewing and thus, could be displayed

without moral contention. Understandably, the determination of intention is not so clearly identifiable with historic Native objects and representing cultural meaning, once again, becomes a dubious task. From this example, the model of collaboration with Native communities for object interpretation is the most appropriate way museums should be developing exhibitions. Literature on this subject will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

The Problem of Temporality

Several postcolonial scholars have discussed the problems associated with presenting a culture in the ethnographic present, where the space of time has been compressed and the exhibited culture's history is depicted as frozen in the timeless present. As the object from the "other" culture has been removed from its original cultural context the museum holds power in the reconstruction not only of its meaning but also of its placement on a temporal plane. The museum may construct a narrative of progress or change within a culture by pointing to certain design elements within the group of objects placed along a deliberately planned timeline. Timothy Luke, coming from a political science perspective, explains:

Museum exhibitions are bolted together out of rhetorical fragments taken from more specific discourses and practices that have not always been fabricated with objective detachment, passive gazing, and dispassionate consideration. Objects on display in museums are disembedded from their social contexts, and the viewing subjects are kept back from the social sites of their origin as they visit and view these objectified museum representations inside a museum's spectacular halls of exhibition. [Luke 2002:219]

Luke describes the inherent subjectivity of temporal reconstruction. Visitors may be unaware of the original cultural context and thus not question the museum's presentation.

Eilean Hopper-Greenhill makes a similar argument to Luke by acknowledging the museum institutions inherent political underpinnings,

The present is deeply influenced by the past, thus the interpretation of objects and collections in the past affects how they are deployed today. Knowledge is both cultural and historical, involving history and tradition. Reclaiming and rewriting history are central issues in cultural politics, and especially in the museum. Exhibitions can open up ideas that have long been suppressed, and can make the formerly invisible histories visible. [Hooper-Greenhill 2000:19]

Hooper-Greenhill's statement touches on issues regarding Native sovereignty and self-representation. Due to the colonial experience in the United States Native Americans have faced challenges in reasserting ownership of their cultural heritage and material culture. Likewise, Moira G. Simpson analyzes exhibitions from a postcolonial standpoint and identifies the persistent problem of exhibiting Native cultures. She explains,

Exhibitions concerning traditional or tribal societies have frequently been criticized for their failure to show them as dynamic, living cultures, but rather portray them as they were seen in the past, thereby giving the impression either that the cultures had indeed vanished, as many Europeans in the late nineteenth century had believed they would, or that their lifestyles persist, unaltered, in the manner of their nineteenth-century ancestors. [Simpson 1996:35]

For this very reason, the NMAI and the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia stand as mainstream models for exhibition making that includes Native people in the development process, thereby promoting the merits of self-representation and collaboration for all museums today. Regarding the NMAI specifically, historical explanations on the text panels in the *Our Peoples* gallery depict a continuum of time where a community has changed, adapted, progressed, and maintained certain cultural practices or ideas. These changes are not framed as indications of cultural

loss but rather as cultural resilience. From the “Native” perspective expressed in NMAI media, time did not stop at the moment of contact and the exhibition texts reflect this sentiment through the presentation of multiple temporal realities. For instance, the Q'eq'chi' Maya exhibit in the *Our Universes* gallery presented time as a cyclical pattern through the change of seasons and life cycles in an interactive calendar media station. Richard West, founding director of the NMAI, describes the guiding principals of the museum as follows,

We do not feel that our goals are necessarily iconoclastic; we believe, rather, that our incorporation of Native voices restores real meaning and spiritual resonance to the artifacts we are privileged to care for and put on public display. We are, in many ways, more a hemispheric institution of living cultures than we are a museum in the traditional sense, because our view of Native cultures is as prospective as it is retrospective; it is as focused on a cultural present and future as it is on a cultural past. We see Native cultures as dynamic and changing, indeed, often brilliantly adaptive, rather than static, which is a status I normally associate only with dead cultures. We believe that the voices of Native people themselves are an invaluable, essential and authentic component of interpreting the past, present and future cultural experience that has been and will continue to be ours in Native America. [West 2000:7-8]

Thus, I perceive there is a close correlation between the inclusion of “Native voice” and the perception of the represented cultures as “modern.” Jennifer Shannon (2008) describes the utilization of the term “Native voice” by curators and staff members at the NMAI in the creation of their collaborative community-curated exhibition spaces. She summarizes the approach—promoted by founding director Rick West—as “the belief that indigenous peoples are best able to teach others about themselves” (Shannon 2008:233). She also extends this notion to refer to an “authoritative voice” that has the power to shape and dictate cultural representations. Conversely, when Native material is

interpreted without Native perspective the visitor is more apt to misunderstand the breadth and diversity of Native peoples, both historically and currently.

The Problem of Authenticity

Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims (1991) in their book chapter, “Locating Authenticity: Fragments of a Dialogue,” discuss the inherent “dumbness” of objects in museum collections. That is to say that an object’s value and meaning are derived only through human contextualization of the said object—the object alone does not hold value. The term “value” also encompasses many interpretations including: personal merit, monetary worth and valuation, import of meaning and significance in society (and the academy through research and publication), and even magnitude as a numeric quantity in mathematics. Within museum exhibitions, monetary valuation often parallels social significance and importance. Objects as recipients of cultural signification (such as value) obviously may differ depending on the context in which they are presented. The authors note,

Authenticity is not about factuality or reality. It is about authority. Objects have no authority; people do. It is people on the exhibition team who must make a judgment about how to tell about the past. Authenticity—authority—enforces the social contract between the audience and the museum, a socially agreed-upon reality that exists only as long as confidence in the voice of the exhibition holds. [Crew and Sims 1991:163]

Thus, object value is intrinsically related to authority. The museum institution as an evaluating force therefore authenticates certain objects by virtue of their “high value” status or denigrates others via exclusion. The viewing audience further authenticates the object by their acceptance of certain objects as valuable; this reinforces the value

judgment first proposed by the museum institution when they selected the object for the exhibition. The process of authenticity is a cycle perpetuated by the museum and active observer. Moira G. Simpson stresses the importance of “authenticity” for museum curators and collectors,

The problem has arisen in part due to the nature of the collections and in part due to the methods of display. The nature of collections reflects the attraction and fascination that unfamiliar artifacts held for collectors and their desire to gather material representative of the cultures they encountered. Within the museum, it was formerly the objective of the curators to try to represent a culture in its pure form with an emphasis upon traditional values and styles, and authentic artifacts and practices. [Simpson 1996:35]

Simpson highlights an obsession that many museums held in the presentation of cultural objects, such as Native American objects that contributed to a noble savage paradigm. By creating an aesthetic categorization of the “authentic,” the museum also constructs a notion of what it deems to be an “authentic” Native identity. Cultural objects that fall within the realm of their categorization are placed on display in a visual narrative that supports their authenticated perspective.

The Native American art market further complicates the notion of authenticity. Within this realm, inherent contradictions developed as traders and collectors began promoting certain aesthetic qualities that they perceived to be traditional while not necessarily allowing for individual innovation of Native artists. Molly H. Mullin states in her chapter, “The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art “Art, Not Ethnology, ”

It became a common practice (one continuing today) to encourage Indian artists to study the collections in museums in Santa Fe, collections which were used as a standard by which new works were judged, thereby strengthening a sense of tradition and aiding artists in the route to authenticity and institutionally sanctioned taste. This was a route that

many of the more ambitious artists were quick to pursue on their own.
[Mullin 1995:181]

Once again, the museum institution authenticates certain narratives about Indigenous peoples not only through the object selection in exhibitions but also through attempts to encourage a particular aesthetic outside the museum space. This circumstance may not be true for most museums but does indicate the power that museums have to validate certain designs or artistic methods in its presentation of Native American culture.

J.J. Brody (1971) in his book, *Indian Painters and White Patrons*, points to the complex classifications of Native American painting in the art market. He problematizes the use of phrases such as “tradition,” or any of the other dichotomies that are used to describe Native art forms. He exposes the traffic of Native painting by White traders who attempt to maintain the art as “primitive” (and the notion that only “primitive” Native art was “authentic” Native art). His departure from popular quixotic narratives of the “Indian” was progressive but as Jackson Rushing describes, “Brody concluded that despite any continuities in form, modern Indian painting had developed in response to the needs of the dominant society” (Rushing 1999:152). His critique points to another issue, that of Native artist agency that brings to mind some of the problems of representation and authority that was introduced earlier in this chapter. Overall, scholarship on Native art—or craft as it has been commonly called in the past—is complicated by the multiple definitions and meanings it has acquired by different actors in the Native art market (traders, collectors, artists, tourists, etc).

Mullin discusses the problem of art versus artifact classification: “Although we should continue to question, as Sally Price and other critics of Primitivism have argued,

the assumption that Western peoples have art, and others have artifacts, the process by which artifacts become art offer no refuge from inequality” (Mullin 1995:186). Here Mullin references Price’s (1989) book, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, which critically analyzes commonly held Western assumptions about objects, or art, produced by the “other.” Therefore, Mullin aligns herself with the critical and reflexive stance that Price projects in her analysis of Western art appropriation. Mullin expands the argument further to question the process by which artifacts have been made into art. While seemingly an exercise towards equality of all art forms, regardless of cultural origin, I argue that outsider-derived definitions of “art” still continue to influence the value and authenticity of objects. One only need to look at the items promoted by Christy’s auction house to realize what art objects are most highly valued in Western society.

Richard Clemmer (2008) and Erika Bsumek (2008) both explore how the market of Native American art and “craft” of the American Southwest was manipulated by collectors and tourists who sought to purchase authentic Native goods. Clemmer specifically investigates how two distinct “labor” classes, leisure and tourist, each contributed towards the shifting market demands of Pueblo pottery around the turn of the 20th century. Clemmer explains how the tourist class sought small, inexpensive curio items as a souvenir “to commemorate *respite* from labour” while the “elite connoisseur” sought high quality, collectable items to commemorate their leisure status and to acquire “appropriate material culture as *productive work*” (Clemmer 2008:189). He argues how the distinction of aesthetic taste reinforces class difference. Thus, the definition of “taste,” exemplified by Clemmer in Pueblo pottery, also defines the terms of authenticity

the Native-produced objects are assigned. In this way, the authenticity of Native art and culture occurred more or less as a dialectic between Anglo-American art consumers and Native artists.

Bsumek (2008) examines the process of “authenticating of the Navaho” in her book, *Indian-Made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1868-1940*. Here, she focuses specifically on the time period since the establishment of the reservation (in 1868) until the creation of the Navajo Arts and Crafts Guild in Fort Wingate, Arizona (Bsumek 2008:211). Bsumek questions the notion of “borrower theory” imposed on Navajos in the early 1900s. For example, in an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, featuring Navajo “craftsmen at work,” the ethnographers and invited trader, Wick Miller, involved in its creation worried that the Navajo people might not be seen as distinctive from their Pueblo neighbors because of their reputation as raiders and borrowers. Bsumek argues that Anglo traders also capitalized on the idea of “cultural borrowing” in their marketing of Navajo weavings. She adds, “they used it [borrowing] to justify their oversight of the designs Navajos wove into their rugs and the styles of silver jewelry the artisans made” (2008:146). Bsumek illustrates how commercial and intellectual circles often overlapped, perpetuating particular notions of the “authentic” Navajo. I argue that the legacy of these conflicting definitions of authenticity is still played out in museum exhibitions today.

The Transformation of Representation

Based on the four problems of representation I have highlighted in this section I have provided summaries of both historical perceptions of Native American material

culture and current new museological practice to remedy concerns posed by Indigenous communities. Through these examples from the postcolonial and museological literature I have attempted to frame my theoretical position as a museum ethnographer and curator. The perspectives presented posit that the challenges of representational politics can be mitigated through an acknowledgment of the repercussions of colonial paradigms that exist in many museum institutions today. Furthermore, the utilization of collaborative methods with Native communities in exhibition practice to act upon this knowledge is seen not only in the museums here in Native North America but in Indigenous community museums around the world. The range of Indigenous museums and museums that present Indigenous cultures are vast. Below I outline just a handful of examples that demonstrate the various ways Indigenous self-representation is being manifested in exhibition practice today.

Many mainstream museums seek to employ collaborative practices with Native communities in order to address the representational dilemmas I have outlined in this chapter. For the over one hundred community advisors from Seattle's Pacific Islander Southeast Asian, East Asian, and Northwest Native American communities that helped create the Burke Museum *Pacific Voices* exhibition in 1997 (at the University of Washington), proper representation meant exploring cultural objects as a reaffirmation of their various community identities (Kahn and Younger 2005:5). The objects presented in the exhibition (still on display currently) each communicated a story that continues to hold relevance for community members today. This example demonstrates how new communities form in urban settings away from their place of origin and recreate

traditions using cultural objects they brought from their homelands or remade with local materials. *Pacific Voices* brings together many community members from all over the Pacific Rim region in a mainstream museum setting.

Many Indigenous community museums, such as the Provincial Museum of Central Kalimantan, Museum Balanga located in Palangka Raya, Indonesia, appear to follow a so-called Western museum model of display but upon closer inspection, Dayak community members actually employ their own museological methods (Kreps 2003:28). According to Christina Kreps who conducted fieldwork in the museum from January 1991 to August 1992, “the ways in which museum work was actually carried out often reflected local values, beliefs, and perceptions on the uses and treatment of objects, which at times, appeared to conflict with those of professional, western museum culture” (Kreps 2003:29). In this way, the Museum Balanga functions as a site where the negotiations of Western and Indigenous approaches to curation and collections management are carried out. The same concept could be applied to most any Indigenous community museum where different knowledge systems (local and “Western”) are mediated in staff and visitor relationships with the objects on display. Other examples of Western/Indigenous museum confluence are presented in *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific*, edited by Nick Stanley (2007).

Tribal museums in the United States such as the A:shiwi A:wam Museum and Heritage Center (Zuni Pueblo) work to promote local knowledge. Per conversations with Jim Enote, director of A:shiwi A:wam, the museum functions primarily for the benefit the community through educational programs in art and oral history projects rather than

focusing on tourist initiatives. Enote referred to the institution as an ecomuseum, acknowledging that it was “a term we learned to use that represented our idea of a community-based museum” (Enote 2007:xi). Furthermore, Enote explains that the museum is not confined just to the heritage center building, but rather functions in all parts of Zuni community schools and households. In this way, A:shiwí A:wán is fulfilling its claim to being a community museum for the people *by* the people. It is also noteworthy that the museum operates as a private federally registered not-for-profit 501c(3) organization. This means that the museum does not technically fall under the jurisdiction of the tribal government. Thus, the name “tribal museum” is complicated by the terms of its definition. New questions raised include: Is it located on tribal lands? Does tribal staff operate it? Does tribal government fund it? While the answers to these questions lie outside the scope of this research study, it is useful to acknowledge the diversity of museums that operate currently for and/or by Indigenous communities.

An example of a successful tribal museum that receives regular tribal funding for operating costs is the Poeh Museum of the Pojoaque Pueblo (located north of Santa Fe, New Mexico). The museum website states,

With a primary focus on the artists of the six Tewa-speaking Pueblos of Northern New Mexico, its programs focus on the preservation of traditional and contemporary Pueblo art and culture. Its rapidly growing collections include contemporary, historical, and archaeological works, which are invaluable resources to artists and researchers from both within and outside the Pueblo community. [Poeh Museum 2011]

The Poeh Museum is also actively working to revitalize “language, traditional song and dance, and material culture” in response to Pojoaque being “systematically stripped of its heritage, culture and traditions by European contact in the sixteenth century” (Poeh

Museum 2011). These decolonizing efforts align with the museums goal to educate both Native and non-Native visitor about the history of Pojoaque and neighboring pueblos. Similarly, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico has adopted a pan-pueblo approach to exhibition representation. All 19 pueblos are featured in exhibit displays and educational programming. Therefore, this can be considered a “multi-tribal” museum.

Thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean on the continent of Australia we find our next set of examples described by Moira Simpson (1996) in her book *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*. Aboriginal cultural centers, or keeping places, serve the role of traditional material repository and educational meeting place (Simpson 1996:119). The number of keeping places has grown significantly since the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s many cultural centers became more engaged in the tourist industry as a way to educate the general public about Aboriginal issues (Simpson 1996:122). In 1995, the Warradja Aboriginal Cultural Centre opened in Kakadu National Park as a tourist destination for those interested in rock art. A keeping place was also established at this site for Aboriginal community members only. In this way, knowledge and access to cultural material is controlled through the center and keeping place with education as a primary function of both sites (Simpson 1996:133).

The necessity of Native self-representation cannot be ignored in this evolving sociopolitical climate. I argue, along with many authors mentioned in this chapter, that increased advocacy by Native people in regards to control over their heritage and in the United States and abroad is redefining not only how cultural material is treated but most

importantly how Native communities are engaged in these increasingly intermeshed frameworks.

The problems and successful models I have identified in this chapter greatly assisted me in the theorization of my master's exhibition with Navajo weaver Roy Kady. Many of the concepts raised here were omnipresent in my mind during the exhibition planning process as we attempted to overcome these obstacles of representation of Navajo weaving. Our exhibition process and rationale in relation to these themes of representation will be explored in Chapter 5. A survey of Navajo weaving literature, exhibitions, and its stakes in broader themes of representation will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REVIEW

An Overview of Navajo Weaving in the Literature

Not only is our language beautiful and descriptive, but also only Navajo words can convey an accurate and true picture of why we weave. Personally, when I speak Navajo I am most comfortable and feel I am best able to manipulate the words to describe my experience with the loom, the yarn, and designs. – D.Y. Begay, Navajo Weaver [Begay 2006:51]

D.Y. Begay, famous contemporary Navajo weaver, describes the importance of Navajo language in the interpretation of her weavings. For her, the language system inherently reflects key Navajo concepts—integral to the recitation of weaving and its associated meanings for her as an artist. Furthermore, the significant meaning and power of language in Navajo identity brings to mind the compelling words of Kenyan postcolonial novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his influential book, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Although Ngugi's writings are politically charged, the central thesis of his book lies in the desire to reclaim African language from the dominant European field of Literature and redefine how literature is conceptualized for the Kenyan people in his formerly colonized homeland. Similarly, Begay's reflection expresses how only the Navajo language can adequately describe the Navajo weaving experience. This sentiment can also be used to inform the importance of Navajo self-representation in the interpretation of Navajo culture. The anthropological legacy of outside forces interpreting, representing, and marketing Navajo cultural heritage necessitates a

reaffirmation of why certain “art forms” are created—not for an outside audience, but for community members themselves.

The following passages identify popular notions and interpretations of Navajo weaving within literature and subsequently in its visual representation in the exhibition venue. Based on a survey of literature published on Navajo weaving, there appears to be a dearth of Navajo perspectives and scholarship on the topic. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming amount of literature has been ethnographic in nature and more recently; publications tend to focus on art historical and political economic perspectives while attempting to include a Navajo “voice.” Navajo weavers have served as consultants in many publications, but the authoritative voice often remains a non-Native interpreter and organizer of the shared cultural knowledge. I argue that the presentation of Navajo weaving in museum exhibitions reflects the most pervasive themes in the current literature: regional rug designs, trade, adaptation, commoditization, and attempts to integrate Navajo perspectives through such marketable themes such as “cosmology.” Many of these past classifications are largely based on an essentialist view of Navajo culture—although some Navajo people have also perpetuated this development. The attempt to organize weaving into geographic, cultural, and gender boundaries is an interesting but ultimately insufficient endeavor for understanding Navajo weaving. Here, I will discuss the main trends in Navajo weaving literature and relate these themes to their corresponding representation in museum exhibitions. I present the reasons why these representations, both in the textual and visual sense, are limiting and serve as a standard from which I departed in the creation of my own exhibition.

In the Navajo (or Diné) language there does not exist a word for art or religion; in fact, even the concept of beautification is an integral part of traditional Navajo philosophy beyond the scope of visual aesthetics. Likewise, while some contemporary weavers today do not consider weaving as “art” due to this traditional philosophy, many others choose to self-identify as “artists” and call their weaving creations “art” in the English language. However, before art could be claimed as a title or expressive space, Navajo weavers and other Native American artists had their work confined to classifications of “craft” by external markets. This phenomenon is referenced in the section from chapter 2, *Problem of Authenticity*. Kathy M’Closkey notes,

It is not enough to discard the word “craft” and add weaving to the art sphere. Neither category adequately describes the context of weaving in Navajo society itself, because the basic tenet of the Western concept of art maintains that the essential value of material culture lies outside the context of its meaning and use. [M’Closkey 2002:8]

Furthermore, the practice of weaving has its origin in our creation stories, in the *hanelnaeheke hani* (moving upward chant legend), when Spider Woman and Spider Man first instructed the Navajo how to create weaving implements and recite the act of weaving. The following version of history was related to me by Navajo weaver, Roy Kady, about the origins of Navajo weaving:

The Spider Man drew some *ndaka'* (cotton) from his side and instructed the Spider Woman how to make a loom. The cotton-warp was made of *nashjei bitlol* (spider-web). The upper cross-pole was called *yabitlol* (sky or upper cord), the lower cross-pole *ni'bitlol* (earth or lower cord). The warp-sticks were made of *shabitlol* (sun rays), the upper strings, fastening the warp to the pole, of *atsinltlish* (lightning), the lower strings of *shabitlajilchi* (sun halo), the heald was a *tsaghadindini isenil* (rock crystal heald), the cord-heald stick was made of *atsolaghal* (sheet lightning), and was secured to the warp strands by means of *nltSATlol billdestlo'* (rain ray cords). The batten-stick was also made of *shabitlajilchi* (sun halo), while

the *beidzoi* (comb) was of *yolgai* (white shell). Four spindles or distaffs were added to this, the disks of which were of cannel-coal, turquoise, abalone and white bead, respectively, and the spindle-sticks of *atsinltlish* (zigzag lightning), *hajilgish* (flash lightning), *atsolaghal* (sheet lightning), and *nltatlol* (rain ray), respectively. The dark, blue, yellow and white winds quickened the *beedizi* (spindles) according to their color, and enabled them to travel around the world and its path left many types of weaving tools for the rest of the world to use. [Email to author, March 4, 2010]

From this passage alone one could understand why Navajo language is integral to the interpretation and meaning of weaving.

Navajo oral tradition relates that sheep, horses, and donkeys were created for the Navajo from white shell, turquoise, abalone and jet gathered from the sacred mountain to the east called *Sis Nateel* (Wilkins 2008:17). There is an interrelated connection with the landscape specifically between the four sacred mountains (current region of the Four Corners). However, this holistic relationship with landscape has various levels of meaning for each weaver. Many non-Navajo interpretations may cite a single interpretation as representative of the entire culture—a problematic practice that perpetuates the notion that there exists a single cultural narrative by which all other narratives are compared and authenticated. For instance, Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, a textile historian and curator, and Anthony Berlant, an artist and collector, co-authored the book, *The Navajo Blanket*, related the following description of Navajo weaving:

Like everything in the significance in the Navajo scheme, the art of weaving is firmly grounded in religious tradition. Legend has it that Spider Woman, one of the Holy People, taught them how to weave. Such a strong link between their own origins and the origins of blanket-making served to connect the material world with the spiritual world, identifying blankets as a rendering in physical terms of the mystical universe. When the Navajo wrapped blankets around themselves, they were surrounding their bodies with the totality of their being, gathering about themselves the four corners of a world at once beautiful and familiar. [Berlant, Kahlenberg 1991:3]

Such visual interpretations above are beautifully poetic but belie a quasi-noble savage sentiment through generalizations of a mystical Native culture. More appropriate interpretations would be provided by weavers themselves—with variations of meaning that would be expected from individual artists as opposed to a gross assumption of an entire culture. Such generalized descriptions are found in Charles Amsden’s (1934) *Navaho Weaving: Its Technic and Its History*, just as one example.

Many other non-Navajo scholars view Navajo weaving simply as an artistic adaptation from their Puebloan neighbors to the east when they married into Navajo communities beginning in the 1600s (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946, Kaufman and Selser 1985, Rodee 1987). Early ethnographies conducted around the turn of the 20th century tended to focus on the gender roles and the affiliated stratification of tasks and ceremonies. In addition, literature on the subject tends to paint an idealized image of the Navajo woman peacefully at work on her upright loom overlooking a Monument Valley vista in the background (Kaufman and Selser 1985:8). Countless images of this sort have been circulated and recreated in various anthropological and historical texts and displays. The corresponding descriptions of Navajo art frame the practice according to Western standards of art and commercial value as discussed in Chapter 2—which includes Western definitions of gender roles that translated weaving simply as a domestic task that happened to be “artistic.”³

³ While it is undeniable the significant role Navajo women have played in the perpetuation of weaving, the discourse that only Navajo women practice the “art form” is misleading. The decision to focus on solely male weavers in this research project was partially made to counter this popular and misconceived belief. This idea will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

The emphasis on tangible aspects of Navajo weaving, such as design patterns, and trade and commodization has also been a popular theme in the literature (Kaufman and Selser 1985, Rodee 1987). The identification of Navajo weaving according to regional rug design is a relatively recent development in history. Prior to the establishment of the reservation in 1868 weaving was a practice conducted primarily for utilitarian purposes and the perpetuation of commerce relationships with neighboring tribes. Woven garments included dresses, belts, blankets, and horse implements. The popular classification of Navajo “rugs” was a later development due to the influence of Anglo traders. As John Adair, a visual anthropologist and producer of the film *Through Navajo Eyes*, notes, “Navajo rugs became the Indian’s idea of the trader’s idea of what the white man thought was Indian design” (Kaufman and Selser 1985:2). Adair makes a crucial point that Navajo weavings have often been contextualized through a Western (epitomized in the trader) perspective and have even influenced the internal artistic interpretations of Navajo weaving design. This, however, does not necessarily imply that Navajo weavers were helpless victims during a period of cultural transition but rather were active agents in the perpetuation of their weaving practice—enacted to the best of their abilities given the historical circumstance of government assimilation policies.

More recently, anthropologists and scholars have problematized the Western interpretation of Navajo weaving and have acknowledged the narrow perspective previous studies have employed. The following texts demonstrate a critical shift in how Navajo weavings are understood by non-Navajo scholars.

Kathy M'Closkey, an anthropologist at the University of Windsor, Canada, has written extensively on the Navajo weaving tradition. In her book, *Swept Under the Rug*, she situates the weavers through a political economic analysis of history, steering away from the typically quixotic narratives as exemplified in prior studies that focus primarily on design analysis (M'Closkey 2002). She organizes her research heavily on analysis of trader archives, government papers, and the influential effect Navajo weavings had on Mexican tapestries that have impacted the global demand for authentic Navajo rugs—rather than an analysis of Navajo weavers as the sole recipient of cultural influence and change. While this text is limited to an economic perspective, Navajo agency is more clearly articulated and demonstrates an effort towards re-contextualizing weaving in a more Navajo orientation.

In another article by M'Closkey (1998), “Weaving and Mothering: Reframing Navajo Weaving as Recursive Manifestations of *K'e*,” she aims to correct for an absence of the feminine voice in the realm of Navajo politics and economics. Similar to the analysis in the aforementioned publication, she focuses her gaze upon the political economical situation of Navajo weavers over the past century. Her investigation addresses the role of the female more adequately by examining the relationship between weaving and “mothering.” She incorporates Navajo concepts of *k'e*, which she defines as “right and respectful relations with others and the nonhuman world” into her analysis of Navajo relationships (M'Closkey 1998:120). These relationships are maintained through a central concept in Navajo philosophy known as *hózhó* (harmony). She describes how

many Navajo women, out of necessity for income, were challenged to meet this ideal due to the pressures of an increasing demand for their rugs.

Meanwhile, Robert S. McPherson (2001), author of “Naalyéhé Bá-Hooghan – ‘House of Merchandise’: The Navajo Trading Post as an Institution of Cultural Change, 1900-1930”, challenges general assumptions that Navajos were commercially backward prior to Anglo-American contact. Instead, he demonstrates the astute economic character of the Navajo that they adopted into their own cultural traditions. The acculturation process occurred in the trading post as a forum of exchange not just in terms of economic transactions but cultural values. He argues that trading posts were not as devastating as some historians imply and rather it was the livestock reduction of the 1930s that marked a significant cultural transformation (McPherson 2001:95). He traces the proliferation of the trading post from 1868 to its height in 1900 and eventual decline by the 1930s. These accounts are significant because they offer a differing viewpoint of the Navajo as more actively engaged in the negotiation of art forms and market demands.

Overall, these texts attribute greater agency to the Navajo people both in the reproduction of their cultural knowledge and also the level of control they assert in their economic condition. Furthermore, over the past twenty years, the literature has reflected an attempt to deconstruct the misperceptions of Navajo weaving as simply a craft and most importantly to include more Navajo perspectives in their publications. Several museums have published books on the Navajo weaving pieces in their collection with interpretation provided by curators and scholars. Ultimately, however, the museum still retains the role of authoritative repository of culture, even if the institution acknowledges

the agency of the Navajo artists and participants. The final product is distributed by a non-Native museum for a largely non-Native audience. But despite these shortcomings, the contextualization of Navajo weaving from an individual standpoint rather than a collective whole marks a significant shift from the stereotypical narratives first referenced in this chapter.

In *Reflections of the Weaver's World* anthropologist Anne Lane Hedlund (1992) highlights the Gloria F. Ross Collection of Contemporary Navajo Weaving at the Denver Art Museum. The introductory chapter includes a section called, "The Weaver's World" with thoughts and quotes from weavers represented in the publication. While this section attempts to contextualize weaving through individual perspectives, the narrative quickly turns into the standard recitation of Navajo history in terms of rug style periods—a classification that had been constructed according to design and value standards by Anglo traders around the turn of the 20th century. However, despite these literary tendencies, the author states a particular purpose that identifies the book as departing from most other Navajo weaving literature which tends to minimize the "artistic" agency of weavers. The author writes,

Unlike many Navajo blanket and rug collections described from traders' and collectors' perspectives, documentation for the Ross collection views weavers as active rather than passive recipients of and respondents to outside influences. Because I'm not a Navajo weaver, I do not write from the weaver's perspective, but I have tried to observe and listen closely and have begun, at least, to understand how little of the weaver's perspectives are represented in other collections or publications. The Ross collection reflects my interpretations of the many voices that belong to contemporary Navajo weavers. Indeed, these weavers and their families are part of the intended audience for this book and exhibition, and so our dialogue continues. [Hedlund 1992:12]

Once again, the notion of Navajo agency is emphasized as a crucial point of interpretation. Within the book each woven piece is pictured alongside a photograph of the weaver and her brief biography (no male weavers have been included in this publication). In keeping with customary Navajo identification the clans of each weaver are stated beneath their names—an integral component to representing each artist in a culturally appropriate manner. This publication, while framed within the context of collecting and regional rug styles, does attribute greater self-representation to each of the featured weaving artists through the inclusion of their opinions and thoughts.

The Edwin L. and Ruth E. Kennedy Southwest Native American Collection (at the Kennedy Museum of Art at Ohio University) also published a catalogue of its Navajo weaving collection based on an exhibition the museum created that was called, *Weaving is Life* (2006). The exhibition and corresponding publication represent four generations of Navajo weavers. It is important to note that D.Y. Begay, a Navajo weaver, served as co-curator in this exhibition with Jennifer McLerran, curator at the Kennedy Museum of Art. Begay's commentary is a significant portion of the narrative within the publication. Each piece highlighted from the collection is shown alongside a short quote from the weaver who created the piece, thus "giving voice" to the weaving. However, little or no biographical information is provided nor are the weavers' clans identified. The emphasis here falls more on the weavings and interpretive meanings - elucidated by museum staff, scholars, and Navajo weavers in separate essays placed throughout the book. Once again, the strength of the publication lies in the Navajo interpretations provided therein but their voice is not a dominant one but rather only a complement to the museum's commentary.

The *Weaving a World: Textiles and the Navajo Way of Seeing* publication was not affiliated with any particular exhibition but the authors worked extensively with the Museum of New Mexico and Laboratory of Anthropology in its development (Willink and Zolbrod 1996). Roseanne Willink, author and former Navajo professor at the University of New Mexico, provides a Navajo perspective in the publication as she facilitated interviews (in Navajo) with over fifty weavers. Paul G. Zolbrod—co-author of the book, professor, and former Museum of New Mexico curator—has written extensively on Native American oral tradition and Western literary heritage. His research transcends a mere textual analysis of literary forms by also focusing on performative elements of such prose. His knowledge of Navajo oral tradition—specifically origin history—helped guide the book’s organization according to the five phases of creation. The interconnections among Navajo language, epistemology, and the expression of creativity in the weaving process constitutes a conceptual relationship that is more appropriately articulated in this publication than the former two I have discussed. And while the weavings presented in publication are not contemporary pieces—excluding weavers to speak on behalf of their own creations—the themes presented in their interpretation speak more broadly about Navajo philosophy and history from multiple living weavers’ perspectives. For example, a group of weavers described a rug related to the Fort Sumner experience to the author:

‘Tears,’ say weavers Annie Morris, Rita Cowboy, and others upon seeing the white drops extending from the long cantilevers surrounding the concentric diamonds and the enclosing zigzags. ‘Songs of prayer,’ June Kalleco calls them, referring to the painful longing for freedom. Scholarly elder Leon Secatero identifies them as light radiating out of the sky toward the earth in response to those prayers. ‘The people are summoning power

from above the way father sky touches mother earth,' he adds. In this piece all recognize suffering and see sadness in this ostensible record of Fort Sumner episode of Navajo history. Once we share with some elders the speculation that this piece was produced in connection with Fort Sumner, it aroused memories of what they were told by those who had endured that ordeal. Others made the association independently. [Willink and Zolbrod 1996:48]

The passage above references many perspectives—and while they all relate to a singular historical experience that provokes a collective association of pain and trauma—each interpretation is unique. This style of narration allows for multiple voices that do not conform to a standardized identity of “Navajo-ness.” Often the “authenticity” of a Navajo perspective may be challenged if it falls outside the public uniform opinion of what is believed to be “authentically Navajo.” These misperceptions are based on a conglomeration of notions ranging from the noble savage paradigm to the victimized poor Indian who has lost his “real culture” in the face of modern capitalism and globalization. Both extremes of the spectrum are problematic. A more accurate rendering of Navajo weaving (and subsequently Navajo culture) is when multiple perspectives are considered—even if contradicting each other—because they allow for a diversity of interpretations and individual voices to be heard.

This overview of the literature about Navajo weaving and its various permutations in exhibition and collection catalogues demonstrates the paradigmatic shift towards more inclusivity of Navajo viewpoints—a standard that is necessary for a better understanding of Navajo weaving and more importantly, a re-assertion of Navajo value systems.

An Analysis of Navajo Weaving Exhibitions

The next level of background research entailed researching and visiting Navajo weaving exhibitions during the Fall 2009 and Winter 2010. Visits to these various museum exhibitions greatly contributed to my understanding of how Navajo weaving is presented to the public through the interpretation of the collected material culture. Taking a cue from James Clifford's essay "Four Northwest Coast Museums," my analysis of Navajo weaving exhibition focuses not only on the cultural material presented but also on the museum as ethnographic object itself. Echoing Clifford's comparative approach I also acknowledge that the studied exhibitions are "seen less as specific articulations of local, regional, or national histories, and more as variants within a unified field of representations" (Clifford 1997b:10). In this section, I question and explore the parallels between common themes of Navajo weaving found in the literature and common themes displayed in the museum exhibitions I visited. I also conducted research online to find Navajo weaving exhibitions created over the last 30 years to gain a sense of what sort of information was typically presented (see Appendix A). The following are my observations of the exhibitions I visited—expressed as both critique and praise—that assisted me in the development of our exhibition concept and design.

Woven to Wear: Navajo and Hopi Textiles from The Durango Collection



Image 1 – Entrance to the gallery. Photo taken by author 2010.

The Durango Collection at the Center of Southwest Studies on the Fort Lewis College campus in Durango, Colorado is representative of 800 years of Southwestern weaving—including Navajo, Pueblo, and Hispanic textiles. The collection has been endowed by Richard and Mary Lyn Ballantine, which allows for new textile acquisition, educational programs, and traveling exhibitions. It was originally purchased by Jackson Clark I, founder of Toh-Atin Gallery in Durango, Colorado, and Mark Winter, owner of the Toadlena Trading Post in Newcomb, New Mexico. Furthermore, the Durango Collection considers itself to be a “living collection in the sense that we seek to communicate the lives and cultures of the weavers, and to place these rugs, mantas, and shawls into the culture and historic fabric of the Greater Southwest” (The Durango Collection 2010). The installment of the *Woven to Wear: Navajo and Hopi Textiles from The Durango Collection* exhibition that I viewed was displayed at the Avenir Museum of Design and Merchandising on the campus of Colorado State University in Fort Collins,

Colorado. The exhibit remained on display from September 17, 2009 through January 22, 2010. For the purposes of this background review I will solely focus on the representation and display of Navajo textiles within this exhibition even though weavings from Hopi and Navajo were displayed.

The first of many problematic descriptions within the exhibition is the complete lack of any Navajo narrative whatsoever. The interpretation of weaving history, for example, contains historically and culturally inaccurate facts. The introductory panel reads, “The Navajo began weaving about 300 years ago; taught by Spider Woman, with tools of sunshine, lightning and rain.” First, according to the non-Navajo historical record weaving was adopted from the Pueblo tribes in the 1500s. Second, Navajo oral tradition informs that the Navajo were taught weaving by Spider Woman *and* Spider Man—however, this a reference that most have overlooked, it may be a matter in interpretation. Navajo philosophy reflects concepts of dualism in many stories and oral history and thus the duality of deities in weaving origins is significant. It provides not only the inspiration for weaving but also influences gender roles in weaving that tend to be associated with these origin references.

The exhibit text presents a standard view of Navajo weaving history according to Western classifications—coinciding more with Spanish colonial and American presence in Navajo territory and not according to weaving history from a Navajo perspective. The timeline provided by the exhibit states:

Navajo weaving has been classified by scholars and aficionados into three periods, these are: *The Classic Period*, from 1700-1875, where the Navajo primarily produced clothing for their own use, *The Transitional Period*, from 1875-1900, when after the Navajo's forced exile at Bosque Redondo

they found their herds scattered and resources depleted, and began experimenting with new materials and designs, and *The Rug Period* through contemporary times, where Navajo weaving has reached a worldwide market.

Furthermore, the text narratives in the exhibition continue a perception of historic Western hegemony over Navajo cultural production; likewise it paints a picture of Navajo dependence. Another text panel states,

While the Navajo could now purchase yard goods for their own clothes, they could also acquire new dyes and commercial yarns for weaving. This dramatically changed the look of Navajo weaving to include an expanded palette of bright colors, design innovations introduced by the traders, and an expanded design vocabulary influenced by the changing world. There was a shift from the Classic Period wearing blanket tradition to the production of rugs and later, the finely woven tapestry tradition.

While this historic interpretation describes a period of social transition for the Navajo during the formative years of the newly established reservation in the late 19th century, it implies that the process of assimilation was responsible for the refinement of Navajo weavings. The evolutionary description from blanket making to “finely woven tapestries” places the value of the woven “product” on the amount of Western design and material influence rather than the Navajo aesthetic philosophy behind each weaving.

Each exhibit case features large high-quality black-and-white historical photograph reproductions that corresponded to the items being displayed in the case. While the inclusion of photographs provides a certain level of cultural context, the use of historical (rather than contemporary) images may serve to perpetuate a “pre-modern” view of Navajo people.



Image 2 – Display case featuring Navajo rug dress and historic photograph in background. Photo taken by author 2010.

Anne McClintock speaks to this phenomenon of “anachronistic space” which she describes as,

Colonized people—like women and working class in the metropolis—do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency [McClintock 1995:30]

Thus, the Navajo—described as a colonized people—exist perpetually in a historical space of time outside the realm of Western progress even as they are continually the recipients of Western cultural influence. This paradox deprives the Navajo weaver of their agency in cultural production, change, and adaptation. This is perhaps the most problematic issue of Native representation in general. Furthermore, text labels next to the case make no particular reference to when the historical photographs were taken or how certain objects in the case may or may not correspond to the assumed historical period. In

fact, the objects in the case span a time period of over one hundred years (1870s to 1990s) but without qualification. Greater explanation about the particular historical circumstances in Navajo society within this time frame would be more useful than a general overview of rug categories.

Overall, the exhibition presents a beautiful display of textiles from various Southwestern cultures and time periods but beyond the basic aesthetic appreciation it provides, the exhibit offers little concrete historical or cultural information. Most facts provided about Navajo weaving are at best very limited, and at worst, culturally inaccurate. The interpretation would have been greatly improved with the inclusion of Navajo weaver perspectives.

Diyogí t'áá bil 'Ánooséél Generations



Image 3 – East facing entrance to the Navajo Nation Museum. Photo taken by author 2009.

The Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona hosted the *Diyogí t'áá bil 'Ánooséél Generations* exhibit from May 14, 2009 through January 23, 2010. Mark

Winter (owner of the Toadlena Trading Post, cited in the previous exhibit review) served as guest curator along with guest co-curator Linda Larouche (also from Toadlena Trading Post). The story of Mark Winter and the Toadlena Trading Post is relevant to understanding the development of the *Generations* exhibition. Mr. Winter began collecting Navajo rugs in 1985 and initially developed a fascination with the Two Grey Hills rug style. His trading post website states,

He couldn't understand why other Navajo rugs and blankets of much lesser quality were selling for many thousands of dollars more. Surely, the use of natural fibers and colors as well as technical excellence of the Two Grey Hills textiles would eventually make them the best Navajo rugs of the 20th century. Collecting the rugs became Mark's passion—yet he was puzzled that the weavers were mostly anonymous, especially when many of them were still alive. [Toadlena Trading Post 2010]

His curiosity brought him to the Navajo reservation in order to learn the identity of the anonymous weavers. When he arrived in Newcomb, New Mexico and discovered the dilapidated Toadlena Trading Post he decided to restore it. He negotiated a lease with the local Navajo Tribal Council and re-opened the trading post for business. With a new venue to display his collection and burgeoning business relationships with the local Navajo weaving community he premiered his first weaving exhibition in September 1997 where he “traced the evolution of Two Grey Hills design by showing examples woven during the decades between 1910 and 1980” (Toadlena Trading Post 2010).

A second show opened in 1998 that included more rugs by contemporary local weavers. In total, over 300 individual weavers were represented where “one can actually see the work of a great grandmother, her daughter and her daughter's daughters together for the first time” (Toadlena Trading Post 2010). Furthermore, More than 1,000

interviews were conducted in order to construct the genealogies of weaving families over the duration of 20 years.



Image 4 –View of family rug groupings in the gallery. Photo taken by author 2009.

This 32 panel exhibit presented at the Navajo Nation Museum as *Diyogí t'áá bil 'Ánooséél Generations* is an updated version of the first iteration that included additional weavings not seen in the inaugural show. The introductory text panel begins with a history of trading posts and the origin of regional rug styles,

By the early 1900s, trading posts had been established throughout the Navajo reservation to provide the people with goods they wanted but could not produce for themselves ... Traders in different regions encouraged weavers to use specific designs and coloration that they felt they could best market. As a result, regional rug styles developed and the rugs were referred to by the area in which they were woven.

Similar to the surveyed literature published on Navajo weaving, trading posts remain the cornerstone upon which all Navajo weaving is contextualized. Not only does this description favor the trader's contribution as the primary factor to the "advancement" of the aesthetic style but also describes the Navajo as a dependent and acquiescent people; falsely made to appear as passive agents in the commodization of their weaving

livelihood. The value of the Navajo weaving, both literally and figuratively, is established in terms of its market price based upon an appraisal defined by Western standards of beauty. Once again, the limitation of Navajo agency in historical definitions perpetuates an uneven power relationship into the modern exhibition. However, based on statements provided on the website by Mr. Winters his primary concern was to identify the weavers “behind the rug” more so than granting them a curatorial authority by providing their commentary in the exhibition.

The exhibit was visually captivating as Two Grey Hills weavings covered the exhibit walls from floor to ceiling; it is unlike any other display of Navajo textiles that I had encountered before. From a perspective of conservation and preservation, the manner in which the rugs were sewn together does not adhere to the most stringent of standards in this regard yet their placement in groupings does heighten the sense of their familial relations.

The weavings are organized according to family lineage—each group of rugs representing a visual genealogy of rug creation in one clan family. The concept of presenting weavings according to kinship relations is an approach that is easily recognizable to a Navajo audience, of whom most are probably already keen to clan social structures. In this very particular design decision, the exhibit presents itself in a much more Navajo oriented perspective. However, if removed from this context, the current text panels may not provide sufficient information to convey the cultural context to a non-Navajo audience. Still, Navajo and non-Navajo visitors alike can appreciate the extensive display of dozens of textiles from one particular region of the reservation.

Each grouping of weavings includes a text panel that provides a visual map of the weavings on display and a genealogy chart of the particular weaving family (according to maternal clan designation). On one hand this approach is interesting to understand how a particular style or design is passed down through the generations. On the other hand such complex “weaving genealogies” remind one of the kinship tables southwestern anthropologists meticulously crafted in their attempts to understand Navajo culture (see Dyen and Aberle 1974, Witherspoon 1975). During casual conversations I had with visitors to the exhibition, I heard many types of reactions. Some expressed praise and awe of the dozens of rugs on display while others were bothered by primacy of the “trader” perspective. The exhibition, no doubt, was an intriguing experience for most visitors. “The most important thing about this exhibit is the weavers. It shows the genius it takes to weave the rug,” Director Manuelito Wheeler said in a press interview (Hardin-Burrola 2004).

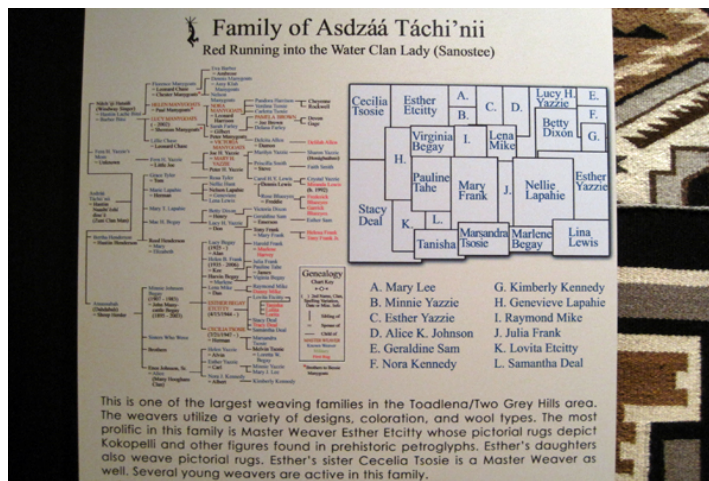


Image 5 –View of family lineage text panel. Photo taken by author 2009.

There are several interactive features of the exhibit that I found appealing. First, there is a carding station where visitors may card a sample of wool. Additionally, a film

documentary on master weaver Clara Sherman plays in the gallery for visitors to watch at their leisure. Clara is quite well-known for her beautiful rugs since she received the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts from the state of New Mexico in 2006. Finally, visitors were also able try their hand at weaving on the demonstration loom erected in the museum lobby at the entrance to the gallery.

Overall, the exhibition was successful in its ability to highlight the importance of weaving among families through the inclusion of so many examples from each clan within the Toadlena/Two Grey Hills region. However, scant interpretation by the weavers themselves was provided. The curator spent years identifying clan groups, individual weavers, and collecting weavings from each family but yet did not include individual perspectives from these weavers. The curatorial authority in this instance is still retained by an individual outside the tribe and notions of trade value heavily influence the interpretation. The exhibit could be greatly improved through greater community inclusion, since the curator already has a long established relationship with many community members through his trading post, and the emphasis would thus shift from a trade centric perspective towards a weaver oriented emphasis.

Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes

The University of Colorado Museum of Natural History in Boulder, CO is well known for its vast collection of textiles of the American Southwest among other Native American objects. The Joe Ben Wheat Textile Collection is named for the museum's former curator of anthropology, who so prolifically collected during his tenure at the

university from 1953 until 1987, and totals approximately 850 pieces. In addition to the expansive assortment of textiles that Wheat amassed, he also systematically studied over 3,000 textiles and their associated documents from other museum collections. *Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes* was a yearlong exhibition consisting of three installments: *Diamonds and Beyond* (May 29 through October 1, 2009); *Dreams, Schemes, and Stories* (October 2, 2009 through February 4, 2010); and *Landscapes* (February 5 through May 30, 2010). This exhibit analysis draws from visits made to the second installment: *Dreams, Schemes, and Stories*.



Image 6 –View of the gallery. Photo taken by author 2009.

The museum’s primary mission is to “contribute to knowledge of the natural world and the humanities through research, teaching, and public education.” (University of Colorado Museum of Natural History 2009). To achieve this end through the Navajo weaving exhibition the museum invited Judy Newland, a museum anthropologist at Arizona State University, to serve as guest curator. She recalls her experience curating the exhibit in the introductory curator’s statement at the entrance to the gallery,

Perplexed over the approach I should take, I thought about my Navajo friends and my weaving background, and discovered that a friend from my past is now an art professor at the University of Colorado. Melanie Yazzie brings a unique perspective to the exhibit. She grew up on the Navajo reservation near Ganado and watched her grandmother weave. As a contemporary printmaker, she brings all of these influences to bear in her own work, and she shared her art and herself during our work together. We spent countless hours looking at wonderful textiles and contemplating the weavers and their lives. During this process, themes emerged, and we eventually divided the textiles into groups, which will be exhibited in three rotations. In this exhibit you can experience the art and creativity of Navajo weavers. We do not always know who made them, but each textile was woven with amazing designs and colors that reflect the life and culture of each weaver. The late Joe Ben Wheat, long-time curator of anthropology at the Museum, built a collection that all can explore in their own unique way. I bring to this exhibit my passion for textiles, my enthusiasm for creative collaboration, and my joy for teaching to offer a closer look at this collection that holds a history in thread for all of us to enjoy.

Melanie Yazzie, Navajo printmaker and associate professor of art at CU Boulder, was a useful resource for gaining cultural perspective into the creation of the exhibit. As stated above, part of her insight as an artist was informed by her grandmother who was a weaver. An installation of her prints titled, *Weaving Memory: Monotypes by Melanie Yazzie*, was also on display during the same time as the weaving exhibition. Despite Melanie's cultural insight, including more Navajo weaver perspectives (and quotes) might have added an additional layer of interpretation that was absent from the exhibition. However, the introductory panel contains a few key phrases that nicely frame what an exhibit of this genre should be promoting, the Navajo people. Newland writes,

Dreams, schemes, and stories; they are all woven into the textiles you see here. The stories contained in these pictorial textiles reflect a changing world, for the weavers, their families and the Navajo people. Precisely placed diamonds and geometric patterns were put aside to create textiles that weave a story using familiar, everyday objects, as well as the new, visually strange products that appeared at Trading Posts.

Finally, the panel situates the prominent rug style seen in the exhibit in its historical situation with the trading posts,

Pictorial rugs were prominent during the last half of the 19th century. The establishment of Trading Posts in the 1870s and the coming of the railroads to the Southwest region brought new ideas and materials to Navajo weavers. Weavers incorporated various cultural influences into beautiful weavings that mirrored life on the newly resettled reservation. Pictorial rugs contained whimsical animals, birds, and figured used as both filler elements and major design features. Although we do not know the specific history of many of these pictorial textiles, all demonstrate the artistic ability and adaptability of Navajo weavers.

While the panel describes briefly the circumstances surrounding the creation of many of the rugs contained within the exhibit, the historical references are clearly from a Western perspective. The curator praises the Navajo for their “artistic ability and adaptability” but makes no mention of the major changes that were occurring for the Navajo and their life ways during this era. This would have been an appropriate time to mention the formation of the reservation in 1868 and how the Navajo were faced with many hardships under the new reservation (such as the Long Walk, loss of sheep, dependence on government food rations, etc). To highlight the tenacity of the Navajo in addition to the craftsmanship in the face of adversity would more realistically describe the complex reality surrounding the development of regional rug styles. Thus, we can see how the meaning of the rugs is affected by how the curator frames their origins.

The curator—as the authenticator of knowledge production in the exhibition—ultimately dictates meaning as she re-contextualizes the objects in the collection according to criteria that may or may not complement the original context from which the object came. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill describes this problem of authenticity and

authority (first discussed in Chapter 2) as being directly related with the placement or use of objects from the collection:

Meaning in museums is constructed in relation to the collections which the museum holds. Questions arise about which objects have been collected and why, and what is known about them from which perspective. One critical element in the construction of meaning within museums is the presence or absence of particular objects; a second vital consideration is that of frameworks of intelligibility into which collected objects are placed. Objects in museums are assembled to make visual statements which combine to produce visual narratives. Collections as a whole, and also individual exhibitions, are the result of purposeful activities which are informed by ideas about what is significant and what is not. [Hooper-Greenhill 2000:3]

In this particular Navajo weaving exhibit there were approximately two dozen textiles on display. One contemporary piece woven by Morris Muskett titled, *Sunset 2*, was the only rug that included a personal quote from the artist on the signage accompanying the piece (because he is a living artist). This is significant because this was the only evidence of “native voice” from a weaver in the entire exhibition. There was one other quote on the wall above the interactive area of the exhibit by Melanie Yazzie that read, “Weaving and life are interconnected, colors, tools, smells, time and family.” This quote is an important addition to the exhibition however, the inclusion of more quotes would make the exhibit content more relevant to contemporary Navajo weavers—Hedlund no doubt has relationships with many weavers through her research. The absence of additional quotes has constructed the meaning of these objects as being a product of art for interpretation and consumption by non-native viewers. Because of the old age of many of these textiles one would of course not expect to see quotes from weavers who are either deceased or unknown; however, the curator should take this

opportunity to explain *why* certain information may be missing about weavers. How might have the meaning or representation of these objects have changed if there were more text included about the weavers, known or unknown? There is undeniably great appreciation for the beauty of these objects but without the prominent incorporation of Navajo perspectives, the objects remain simply “artifacts” without the voice to situate their meaning in the context of the culture from which they were created.

The “frameworks of intelligibility,” mentioned by Hooper-Greenhill (2000), that are placed upon the Navajo rugs in this exhibit are primarily Western standards of conservation and preservation. Furthermore, the very notion of “preservation” takes on a different meaning depending on who is applying it. From a generalized Native perspective, preservation may refer to the practices that perpetuate one’s cultural heritage or the methods to protect the *spiritual* integrity of an object in a museum collection. On the other hand, from a Western museum perspective preservation relates very closely to methods of conservation and how to best maintain the *physical* integrity of the object. Both interpretations are relevant in their appropriate contexts. The problem lies with the treatment of Native objects *in* a Western museum where meanings are often de-contextualized and re-contextualized in ways that may not coincide with original cultural understandings. While this situation cannot wholly be avoided, the more information that is presented from multiple Native perspectives will show the diversity of Native art, inspiration, backgrounds, etc.

The gallery also featured a multimedia area where the visitor could watch a five minute informational DVD about the collection. The film highlighted the work of Joe

Ben Wheat, the collection, and the museum's dedication to conservation for the purpose of education. There was no information about the weavers or Navajo people mentioned in this film. Also in the film, Pat Kociolek, the museum director, described the museum's goal to "understand the people through the material objects they created." Judging by this statement there seems to be a lack of understanding of the value of the *living* culture's interpretation of these "material objects." The incorporation of contemporary Navajo perspectives would certainly facilitate a change of emphasis from object-centric towards people-centric orientation.

Weaving in the Margins: Navajo Men as Weavers

In 1909, anthropologist Edgar Lee Hewett founded the Museum of New Mexico with a vision to collect and preserve Southwest Native American culture. Later in 1927, funding provided by John D. Rockefeller and his foundation helped establish the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, New Mexico with a similar mission to study and document Southwest Native cultures (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 2009). Finally in 1947 the two institutions merged and continued its mission of collection and stewardship. It wasn't until 1987 however that the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (MIAC) was established, providing exhibition space for the museum's collection and updated storage for the Lab (Lewis and Hagan 2007).

Today, MIAC considers itself "a premier repository of Native art and material culture and tells the stories of the people of the Southwest from pre-history through contemporary art" (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 2009). Furthermore, the mission

statement of the museum is “to inspire appreciation for and knowledge of the diverse native arts, histories, languages, and cultures of the Greater Southwest”. MIAC serves New Mexico residents and the many tourists that visit Santa Fe annually for various Native oriented events, such as the famous Indian Market held annually in August. Because of the Native focus of the museum’s collections and exhibitions, the website stresses the importance of serving “the Indian communities in our state and throughout the Southwest whose contemporary and ancestral cultures are represented in the museum's collections” (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 2009).

Despite the under-representation of Native staff, the museum actively seeks partnerships with neighboring Native communities. For example, the Native Arts and History Project, established in 2001, exists to “develop projects and curriculum of cultural significance and relevancy to the Southwest” in collaboration with educators that serve 12 public and private schools that serve Native children in Santa Fe County (Museum of Indian Arts and Culture). Furthermore, the current long-term exhibition, *Here, Now and Always*, was created based on eight years of collaborative research with Native American elders, artists, scholars, teachers, writers, and museum professionals. The website describes the project as:

Voices of fifty Native Americans guide visitors through the Southwest's indigenous communities and their challenging landscapes. More than 1,300 artifacts from the Museum's collections are displayed accompanied by poetry, story, song and scholarly discussion. [Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 2009]

Likewise, the production of *Weaving in the Margins: Navajo Men as Weavers* was based on collaboration between exhibition staff and Navajo male weavers. *Weaving*

in the Margins was on display from June 13, 1999 through September 5, 1999. It is worthwhile to note that because this exhibition occurred a decade ago I did not physically visit the exhibition. My analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with museum staff involved in the exhibit and examining the exhibition guide.

In the following pages I will describe details of this exhibition process based on interviews with two exhibition staff, Louise Stiver, exhibition curator, and Joyce Begay-Foss, exhibition educator. First, I outline the exhibition approach with an introductory passage to the exhibition guide written by the curator:

The Red Valley of Arizona is bathed in sunlight as we make our way on paved and dirt roads to visit a family of Navajo weavers. Nestled between the Carrizo Mountains and the volcanic neck of Shiprock, the landscape is sprinkled with hogans, corrals, sheep, and an occasional llama amid the spectacular red sandstone cliffs and the black volcanic plugs.

Like other weaving families in scattered communities across the Dine Nation, the Jacksons learned the art of weaving from female relatives and they supplement their subsistence life-style with the sale of their rugs. What makes the Jackson family uncommon, though, is that the father and son are weavers.

Most hand-woven textiles produced by Navajo weavers are the work of women, and the image of Navajo women at her loom has become synonymous with this art form. For many generations, though, perhaps ever since Spider Man and Spider Woman first taught the Navajo people weaving skills, Navajo men have been practicing this tradition along with the women of their families. Even so, in the past their work has been rarely acknowledged outside or inside their communities. Indeed, the contribution of men to this rich tradition has been largely undocumented. Today, weaving is a vital pursuit for a growing number of male weavers. For some, it fulfills a need to create or to carry on cultural traditions. For others, it brings in much needed income or economic assistance. Presented here are nine weavers who tell their own stories about why weaving is an important calling for them. [Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 1999:1]

The above statement acknowledges the lack of documentation and awareness of male weavers. This is important because many other exhibitions I have seen, such as the

other examples presented previously in this chapter, did not problematize the reproduction and representation of knowledge about Navajo weaving. While Stiver does not speculate the reasons for the paucity of this knowledge, she heightens the necessity for sharing the story of male weavers by bringing awareness to their “marginal” position.

The introductory statement also included both contemporary and past motivations weavers held in their practice—a point that allowed for multiple Navajo perspectives. Other exhibitions tended to present weaving solely as a “traditional” cultural practice that replicates specific designs and narratives. This statement allows for variation of meaning and incentive for the weavers included in the exhibition.

Finally, the statement actually references a family of Navajo weavers. The inclusion of real people creates a sense of familiarity between the visitor and the weavers presented. Therefore, the weavings presented in the exhibition are not merely objects but rather are rugs that carry a human connection that the visitor can identify in the photographs and quotes that accompany the rugs on display.

Nine weavers participated in the exhibition: Gilbert Begay, Ron Garnanez, Jason Harvey, James Henio, Roy Kady, Albert Jackson, Carleton Jackson, Milton Laughing, and James Sherman. Stiver solicited their participation by attending annual Sheep is Life celebration events.⁴ Prior to the exhibition, she held a personal interest in Navajo weaving and wanted to depict the male perspective that she felt was overlooked.

Originally, she desired to highlight historic weavings by men such as Hastin Klah

⁴ The Sheep is Life celebration is an annual event sponsored by Diné be' iiná, Inc., a Navajo non-profit organization that supports management of all types of livestock, conservation and restoration of land, water, grazing areas, and other natural resources. The celebration focuses sheep raising, butchering, and all elements of the weaving process through educational workshops and demonstrations for the public. DBI events serve as an important networking venue for Navajo weavers. Visit <http://www.navajolifeway.org/> for more information.

however she later decided to focus solely on contemporary weaving when she found a significant number of male weavers in the Navajo community.

Over the course of three years Stiver developed the exhibition with seven other MIAC staff and consultants, two of whom identified as being Native American. The exhibition concept was presented to the museum's Indian advisory panel followed by planning for the exhibition book and film media. Stiver interviewed each of the weavers in their homes with the assistance of Joyce Begay-Foss who speaks Navajo. The interviews were filmed and edited as a short film production shown in the exhibition gallery. An outcome of including the film and photographs of weavers in the gallery was to show them in a modern context. As a result, Navajo culture was not presented in a static fashion but rather in a more dynamic and present-day light.

The exhibition guide provides a brief statement of each of the featured weavers along with a photograph of the artist and one of their weavings that was displayed in the exhibition. The following passage describes weaver Roy Kady:

Navajo weavers are pursuing new directions today by developing their own unique weaving styles. Roy Kady is one such weaver. He was taught by his mother and grandmother but didn't envision it as a viable career until about thirteen years ago. 'One day I was sitting there talking to my mom,' he recalled, 'and she said that none of my sisters showed an interest in weaving. She wanted to pass on her weaving tools. I told her, 'maybe I should go in that direction,' Right then and there she got the materials, the yarns out, and she helped me warp the loom.'

Roy teaches traditional arts including weaving to gifted and talented students at Teec Nos Pos school in northeastern Arizona. 'I'm really accepted in this community and other weavers are always encouraging me, as well, everywhere I go. I haven't run into anyone who says I shouldn't be doing it. I feel I'm recognized as a weaver—it took a long time.' [Museum of Indian Arts and Culture 1999:2-3]

Like Roy's description, the other weavers each recounted how they started weaving and their inspiration to continue weaving. Their responses are varied and demonstrate the multiple perspectives and backgrounds from where they originate. The inclusion of personal quotes as the main method of interpretation in this exhibition served as an inspiration for the exhibit project that Roy and I would later execute. Striver related that many of the weavers were pleased to have their pieces displayed in the exhibit because it promoted their marketing efforts. She recalled how the majority of the featured weavers did not prefer to sell through trading posts, thus the promotion of their work in the exhibit helped them target potential clients without the assistance of a third party vendor. She further explained that she felt the weavers were pleased with how they were represented in the exhibition. Roy's interpretation of how he felt he was represented will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Joyce Begay-Foss, the exhibition educator, had a very personal experience working with the weavers since she herself is Navajo and an avid weaver. She noted how all the weavers featured in the exhibition balanced their artwork with a "day job." Her special interests in the exhibition stemmed from a desire to show how male weavers were "thriving in their own way by balancing work, family, and weaving" (Personal conversation September 23, 2009). Begay-Foss acknowledged that Navajo artists have defined the weaving market but also according to western standards that have traditionally dictated a stronger female role in the art form. She believes that "the balance of the male and female has always been there" (Personal conversation September 23, 2009). In that way her contribution to the exhibition was focused on education, namely,

“for our own people” (referring to the Navajo community). However, the typical MIAC visitor tends to be a non-Native resident of Santa Fe or another Northern New Mexico location. Visitor numbers peak during the summer months, mostly during the month of August when the famous Santa Fe Indian Market draws thousands of tourists interested in Native American art from around the world. Many of these visitors would have visited the exhibition during this time.

Begay-Foss confessed that the exhibition received some criticism from both Western and Native perspectives. This may be in part because *Weaving in the Margins* was the first exhibition to focus on male weavers and the public was not accustomed to perceiving Navajo weaving as an art form practiced by *both* genders. She and Stiver decided upon the interview questions for the weavers jointly. She acknowledged the challenges of creating the questions because “some knowledge isn’t meant to be shared” (Personal conversation September 23, 2009). Begay-Foss explained that elders did not answer questions about religious beliefs or customs but many of the younger weavers expressed less hesitancy answering these questions—even if only for the museum staff and not the general public. She observed through these interviews that, “things have changed between the generations” because of the differing perceptions of knowledge sharing. Her insight as a Navajo weaver reflecting on the exhibition process pointed to the challenges of presenting alternative cultural narratives; a view of contemporary Navajo society where defining gender roles carries just as many perspectives and debates as mainstream American culture. I would later come to more intimately understand these challenges in the creation of my exhibition with Roy Kady.

Overall, the exhibition created an increased interest in male weavers as a new genre of research and marketing. In fact, Wesley Thomas, former academic dean at Diné College and practicing weaver, contributed to the development of the exhibition. His interpretation of Navajo Weaving from a male perspective was included in the exhibition guide (see Appendix B). By including and highlighting the male side of Navajo weaving practice, a new way of understanding the art form that challenged wide-held notions of “tradition” was introduced. Five years later these same exhibition themes would be reincarnated at the Navajo Nation Museum, explained in the following segment of this chapter.

Diné Dah’ Atl’ó (Men Who Weave): A Revival in Diné Bikéyah



Image 7 –Exhibition poster from museum archives. Photo taken by author 2010.

Similar to *Weaving in the Margins* at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, *Diné Dah’ Atl’ó (Men Who Weave): A Revival in Diné Bikéyah*, focused on weaving produced by Navajo men. The exhibit ran from August 5, 2004 through January 15, 2005

at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona. This is one of two Navajo weaving exhibitions that I studied at this venue and the only tribally sponsored exhibition that I surveyed. Manuelito Wheeler, Navajo Nation Museum director, noted that a “point of pride” for the institution is creating “all Native curated” exhibitions. While the museum is fully funded by the tribal government, the “tribe” (as many refer to the government body) does not influence exhibition content or design decisions. Mr. Wheeler explained to me,

At first glance the museum seems to follow an imperial [colonial] model, as in formal [Western] presentation but just because we’re Indian people don’t assume we don’t want a museum, don’t assume we only want a community center. [Personal conversation, January 11, 2010]

With these words in mind the Navajo Nation Museum has defined itself as an institution established for and by the Navajo people while at the same time striving to uphold so-called Western standards of preservation. Furthermore, the *Men Who Weave* exhibition, more than any of the others I included in this chapter, served as a model for my own exhibition process. A number of factors make this exhibit not only an apt model for Navajo weaving representation but also an ideal model for tribal community exhibition making in general. The exhibition engaged the Navajo community in all levels of the planning process, promoted Navajo values in its methodology, included the Navajo language in the text panels and publication materials, and finally situated Navajo weaving as a contemporary site of cultural continuity *and* change.

The ideas introduced in this section will be expanded further in the following chapter in my discussion of museum collaboration. For now, I begin my analysis with the introductory statement to the exhibition guide,

The real story behind the exhibition Men Who Weave is not in the portrayal of the artisans or in the work they present. The story is of a grassroots movement by the male weavers who are at the forefront of an effort to bring back what they consider to be the traditional ways of *Diné* life. Many of the men participating in this exhibit are actively involved throughout the reservation, attending monthly “Spin Off” meetings held throughout *Diné Bikéyah*, coordinating the activities in the *Diné bé Iiná* celebrations, working to bring the Churro sheep back to the Navajo, and educating men, women, and children in the traditional ways of working with the wool.

It hasn’t always been this way. Male weavers have historically been overlooked—in the literature on weaving and in their communities—by the common perception that *in the Navajo world only the women weave*. The idea that weaving was women’s work drove many talented men to sell their rugs by way of a mother, a sister, or an aunt. Over half the weavers interviewed for this exhibit tell of a time when they hid their talents out of embarrassment or fear of ridicule. This exhibition celebrates the current revival and the men who never lost touch with weaving as a vital part of their heritage. [Navajo Nation Museum 2004:1]

Once again, male weavers are situated in a narrative that runs counter to mainstream public perceptions. Themes of grassroots cultural revitalization are presented as a central focus via mention of *Diné bé Iiná* (Sheep is Life) celebrations and weaving as a tool of heritage preservation. This intended positioning speaks to broader efforts the Navajo Nation currently faces to preserve language, promote knowledge of traditional oral histories, and the eco-revitalization of the churro sheep breed and associated weaving practices. The importance of this “story” is the agency expressed by weavers and Navajo exhibit staff in the assignment of Navajo values and Indigenous methodologies as a central concern in both exhibition theory and practice. The objectives for the project were advertised in the exhibition guide as follows:

To enlighten the public, Navajo and non-Navajo alike, about the men who continue the ancient male Navajo tradition of weaving, through as exhibition on the men and their work, and to promote the products of the community of male weavers. [Navajo Nation Museum 2004:1]

The exhibition guide not only defined specific goals for the project but also included a two-page explanation of the exhibition process. This sort of reflexive museology was important to build trust within the weaving community members represented and the audience that viewed that exhibition. The explanation described two issues that “emerged as paramount to the essence of the exhibition: the isolation many male weavers feel regarding their art, and a sense of the intrinsic value weaving holds in their culture” (Navajo Nation Museum 2004:3). Despite the cultural sensitivity of the exhibition topic, Clarenda Begay, exhibition curator, believed the participating artists felt pleased with their representation in the exhibition. She cites the success of the exhibit due in part to her relationship with Roy Kady, with whom she “really enjoyed working ... he has a reason and story for everything he does” (Personal conversation, January 11, 2010). Together they worked in the development of exhibition themes, interview questions, and meetings with weavers. An explanation of this process from Roy’s perspective will be further elucidated in Chapter 5.

The exhibit planning process also included several interviews and film documentation (similar to *Weaving in the Margins*). Leslie Doran, producer and owner of Doran Visual and Media Arts, produced two versions of a film in conjunction with the exhibition. One version was shown at conferences and film festivals, including the 3rd Annual Golden Film Festival (Golden, CO) held February 24 through 27, 2005. Plans had been made to create a full-length book publication based on the exhibition research and media but funding problems halted its progress.

The physical exhibition began with a story of Hastiin Klah, a historical Navajo medicine man and the most well known male weaver (see Newcomb 1964). Klah is a significant figure for many male weavers not only because of the popularity he generated for weavers of the male gender but also his deeply sacred practice of weaving and medicine. He became a controversial personality for his sand painting weaving designs; challenging a cultural taboo of making ceremonial designs permanent. His story is represented as the unifying feature of the weavers presented in the exhibit. The exhibition guide states:

The legacy left behind by this revered *hataalii* (chanter) is vast. For the weavers of the exhibit *Men Who Weave* it is the knowledge that there was one before them—one who was respected and honored because of his weaving gifts. [Navajo Nation Museum 2004:10]

The exhibition purpose thus seems to take a moral stance against stereotypes towards male weavers that have persisted in Navajo society. There exists a common misconception that to be a male weaver is to be gay. This is certainly not the case. However, Klah held special status in his community because he was *nadleeh*, literally a hermaphrodite. He practiced both “male” and “female” roles and was revered as a leader figure for his unique gender. While some weavers who are gay identify with him for his alternative gender and expression of female roles, other weavers identify with him simply for his weaving talents. Because this exhibition took place in the heart of Navajo country, these issues no doubt played a role in public perceptions of the project. Thus, the presentation of the same theme at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe probably produced very different results. Both may have been successful in their own right but the success of the Navajo Nation exhibition demonstrated an effort on the part

of museum staff to dispel negative stereotypes about male weavers, not just to present the public with an alternative portrayal of Navajo weaving.

While *Weaving in the Margins* showcased nine weavers, *Men Who Weave* presented nineteen weavers in the exhibition: Gilbert Begay, Shane E. Begay, Allison Billy, Eddie Black, Garrick Blueeyes, Herman Brown, Alfred Castillo, Ron Garnanez, Nathan Henry, Jaymes Henio, Albert Jackson, Carleton Jackson, Heber Johnson, Roy Kady, Ronnie Lee, Juan Jay Scott, Robert Tohe, Eli Van Winkle, and Larry Yazzie. Many of the weavers featured in the first installment (*Weaving in the Margins*) also agreed to participate in the Navajo Nation version (*Men Who Weave*). Additional weavers were contacted through local weaving guilds, Sheep is Life celebrations, local “spin-off” events and advertisements in the *Navajo Times* newspaper. I also attended “spin-off” events to meet local Navajo weaving community members. Begay’s community based approach was a model I adapted for our exhibition process.

Men Who Weave not only included weavers who utilized wool as a “medium” but also other fiber arts such as basketry. This was a significant contribution because few individuals outside academic circles and the Navajo weaving community consider basketry as a form of weaving. In addition, the inclusion of Navajo terminology (in a glossary format in the exhibition guide) for weaving implements, figures in Navajo creation stories, and geographic locations on the Navajo reservation also reveal a Navajo orientation not seen in other exhibitions.

Like the *Weaving in the Margins* exhibition, each featured weaver related a short narrative about his weaving inspiration and practice. Photographs and information about

potential weavings for sale are also provided. Not only did the exhibit market the weavers' work by being on display in a gallery for five months but the exhibition guide actually provides contact information so that interested buyers could contact the weavers directly. The guide also states whether the weaver was interested in selling and what types of weaving they would create. This sort of marketing allowed the weavers to decide the terms of their sale upfront (if they noted an interest in selling) and also increased the value of their work through display in a gallery setting.

The most significant element that depicts a Navajo perspective of not only weaving, but also Navajo culture in general, is the placement of the weaver's clan identification below their name on each of the artist's pages in the exhibition guide. While seemingly a small detail, this method of identification still holds vital importance today in Navajo social structure. While it may no longer dictate marital or communicative customs, its use to situate oneself in relation to another within the community is a noteworthy contribution in the exhibition. For the Navajo visitor they may be able to create a more personal connection based on geographic and/or clan associations.

Overall, I was most impressed with this exhibition although regrettably I was unable to see the physical installation. I witnessed it vicariously through photos, exhibition guide, interviews with staff, and viewing and photographing each of the exhibit text panels held in collections storage. The incorporation of multiple Navajo perspectives in the interpretation and design of the exhibition (by both museum staff and represented artists) created a project that exemplified the sort of collaboration that more museums should employ in the creation of exhibitions featuring Native artists. In this

way, the *Men Who Weave* exhibition provided an impetus for analytic exploration into the processes of collaborative exhibition making. In the following chapter, I illustrate my approach to collaboration as a methodology as explored in the literature and in practice with Roy Kady.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

Critical Indigenous Methodology

Colonialism's most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world - Ngugi wa Thiong'o [Thiong'o 1986:16]

The paradigm of Indigenous methodology is a relatively recent trend made popular by one of the first publications of the movement, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). The title references the author's position within the discourse of postcolonial literature. Tuhiwai Smith problematizes the utilization of common terms such as research, history, theory, and even the various connotations of "Indigenous"; and the types of knowledge they produce. I was struck by the differentiation Tuhiwai Smith noted between the label Indigenous people and Indigenous peoples. To a non-Native scholar the distinction may seem slight but the implications of the phrase's variation hit at the core of what Indigenous methodologies attempt to deconstruct: "The final 's' in 'indigenous peoples' has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples" (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:7). The acknowledgement of these differences mark a shift in not only how Indigenous researchers perceive and project themselves in academia but more importantly how these reclassifications have

serious political and ethical ramifications for how research is conducted in Native communities.

Over the past decade a number of texts have been published across many disciplines that focus on Indigenous methodologies and research methods. Such titles include: *Decolonizing Research in Cross-Cultural Contexts: Critical Personal Narratives* by Kagendo Mutua and Beth Blue Swadener (2004), *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* by Sandy Grande (2004), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* edited by Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008), *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* by Shawn Wilson (2008), and *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* by Margaret Kovach (2009). *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* edited by Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird is hands-on workbook aimed towards Native community activism on a variety of projects from education to repatriation.

These books offer critical and often personal insight into the postcolonial critique of Indigenous scholarship and the activism promoted through decolonizing discourse. Like the works of many of the Indigenous authors cited above, my research involves a process of self-reflection. As any scholar who becomes deeply and personally invested in their research, I saw the development of our collaborative exhibition as a process to help explore my own subject position as a young Navajo woman in relation to the project, to Roy, and to the anthropology department at the University of Denver. Specifically, I felt reassured by a passage I read by Margaret Kovach that expressed sentiments similar to

my own feelings as an Indigenous researcher. Kovach related her own process of writing her manuscript on Indigenous methodologies saying,

This book emerged from this particular research journey, the questions that I have asked, and the meaning that I have made from abundant and powerful knowledge shared with me. Had this occurred at another time in my life, the interpretations might have been different. We know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that. I situate myself not as a knowledge-keeper —this has not been my path—rather my role is facilitator. I have a responsibility to help create entry points for Indigenous knowledges to come through. [Kovach 2009:7]

Indeed, these words continued to resonate with me as I examined our exhibition process in retrospect. The author's vignette of her emotional connection to "Indigenous" research heightened the knowledge that I also gained through our exhibition experience. I even found myself reciting the same role as facilitator in my conversations with Roy, explained in greater depth in Chapter 5. I did not realize how similar my perspectives were to Kovach until I had concluded my research and had time to reflect and reformulate my thoughts. During this period of critical introspection I became aware of the fact that my collaborative methodology evolved through the collaborative process of exhibition making itself. Initially, my interest in meeting Roy was to interview him about his perceptions of representation and being represented in the museum venue—namely, through his experience in two prior exhibitions presented on Navajo male weavers (explained in Chapter 3). My interest in collaboration was a secondary consideration in our interview; however, as our relationship developed and the exhibition planning got underway my concern with collaborative and Indigenous methodologies came to the forefront.

The theorization of our collaborative process was developed after the exhibition was dismantled. A retrospective analysis of the exhibition led me to employ a critical personal narrative approach. This sort of reflexive practice has been categorized as a postcolonial counter-narrative; a sort of creative analytic practice that “blurs the edges between text, representation, and criticism” (Denzin, et al. 2008:13). It is now considered a central genre of contemporary decolonizing writing for how it is used to criticize “prevailing structures and relationships of power and inequity in a relational context” (Mutua and Swadener 2004:16). Specifically, I employ a reflexive Indigenous ethnography that breaks the traditional “self and other” dichotomy, as I am simultaneously an outside researcher working within my own tribal community with a certain level of “inside” knowledge. I am by no means an expert of Navajo knowledge but my subject position as a Navajo researcher allowed me to work in the community with less hesitation from informants and participants who were able to locate me within clan and social networks. Furthermore, such introspection of “writing one’s self into a text depends on a certain level of honesty to self-implicate. One’s personal feelings are a reaction to the situation one is in and with whom one is engaging” (Tomaselli, et al. 2008:368). This sort of “self-investigation” (Holman Jones 2005:767) that situates one’s role and context in the research project is the guiding model for the style of analysis in our exhibition experience.

To situate our particular project within the field of other Indigenous projects I turn once again to *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). In this book Smith has outlined 25 projects as Indigenous

imperatives within decolonizing methodologies. While not readily apparent, my approach to the exhibition process coincided with many of the Indigenous projects Tuhiwai Smith described. Below I describe ten of these approaches that I utilized in my exhibition and research design: Storytelling, Indigenizing, Revitalizing, Connecting, Reading, Writing, Representing, Networking, Naming, and Sharing. Each project shares varying levels of similarity that are a useful comparison and model in my work.

Storytelling and oral histories are described as an integral and powerful part of Indigenous research. They emphasize dialogue and communication as a unifying device amongst families and communities. Tuhiwai Smith explains, “the story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (1999:145). Roy is a storyteller and an educator; these two facets of his personality coincided with our approach towards exhibition making—telling Roy’s story. Our inclusion of Spider Man’s legacy on a single text panel was based on an account Roy of the story that shared with me. Furthermore, Roy’s lecture presentation resembled more of a personal story rather than a formal lecture about Navajo weavings.

Tuhiwai Smith notes the importance of indigenizing research projects that center on “indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action.” While these ambiguous terms are fraught with complications about what being indigenous actually means and what constitutes indigenous research, the basic premise of utilizing a critical approach that “privileges indigenous voices” was a concept that was particularly appealing to me (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:146). The aim of our exhibition was, in part, to heighten the voice

of the artist and present the material through his first person perspective. My voice, while also a different type of Native voice, was included on the introductory text panels (as I authored these panels, the other panels and object labels were descriptions provided by Roy). As a whole, the Navajo artist's perspective of weaving was privileged above other sources of information.

The theme of Revitalization is an increasingly popular categorization for so-called Indigenous projects. Tuhiwai Smith (1999:147-8) focuses specifically on language revitalization efforts being developed in Native communities but I understand revitalization to include much broader endeavors. I define revitalization projects also to comprise those that promote oral history traditions and art forms, food sovereignty, environmental conservation of sacred territories, and the re-introduction of past agricultural methods and applications. Building from Roy's past involvement with *Diné be' iiná*, a Navajo non-profit organization that promotes the revitalization of the Churro sheep breed, our exhibition highlighted these efforts through video multimedia presented in the gallery and the inclusion of various Churro products that were significant to Roy (pelts, wool, yarn skeins, et cetera).

The concept of Connection has layered meanings according to Tuhiwai Smith. The author references the connection that creation stories and oral histories create between Indigenous people and their ancestral homelands, sacred spaces, and universe beyond. Another form of connection is forged between communities and families in the social networks that are reinforced by shared cultural values. Overall, the main message that I find applicable to my research states that, "connecting is about establishing good

relations” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:149). For Roy, I perceived his didactic goals of community weaving education to align with the aforementioned notions of connection. Furthermore, he not only wished to connect his experience with other Navajos (such as within his community of Teec Nos Pos) but the non-Native public as well.

Tuhiwai Smith establishes Reading as an Indigenous imperative insofar that it can critically analyze and reinterpret Western accounts of history. This critique is meant to offer multiple, subaltern perspectives to an otherwise single narrative conception of historical events: “These origin stories are deconstructed accounts of the West, its history through the eyes of Indigenous and colonized peoples” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:149). In the case of our exhibition, we critically questioned the reproduction of Navajo weaving as a feminine task and as an art form defined by regional classifications or market value. Our initial approach was defined in part as a reaction to these common themes to which we did not conform. Our concern was centered on a simple premise that artists should interpret their own work. Therefore, I would argue that by virtue of being an Indigenous project does not necessarily make it a critical endeavor. Our project happened to be Indigenous because of our community affiliations and subject matter in addition to being a critical exploration of Navajo weaving as a research genre.

Similar to how Tuhiwai Smith frames Reading, Writing is considered an Indigenous communicative device that appeals to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience demographics alike. Writing is conceived in “a variety of imaginative, critical, and also functional ways” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:149). While the author focuses on language revitalization programs in relation to the proliferation of Indigenous

publication, I perceive the process of writing and reflecting on our exhibition project to be an important contribution to Indigenous scholarship. I analyze our collaborative experience with a critical gaze and examination of how our project fits into the broader frameworks of Navajo weaving exhibitions.

The theme of Representation is one of the primary Indigenous imperatives that we utilized in our exhibition. Tuhiwai Smith explains, “representation of Indigenous peoples by Indigenous peoples is about countering the dominant society’s image of Indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:151). She contextualizes the necessity for self-representation as a reaction to colonial hierarchies. Likewise, Roy and I emphasized his personal interpretation of weaving as informed by broader Navajo traditions and teachings. The layers of “self-representation” also were varied; Roy employed self-representation of himself, his art, and Navajo community while I exercised self-representation of myself as a curator and a Navajo woman.

Networking is a crucial task for any collaborative project. Tuhiwai Smith (1999:156) stresses its importance with Indigenous communities as building knowledge and long-lasting relationships. I felt my work with Roy was just as much about building a platonic and professional relationship as it was about creating an exhibition together. Our common perspectives on many issues enriched the experience of planning an exhibit while our differences allowed us to learn and grow from one another. While Tuhiwai Smith (1999:157) speaks of networking as a “form of resistance” I viewed my approach to networking as form of inclusivity. Roy and I sought to include as much Navajo input as possible in our planning process but also to acknowledge the participation of all non-

Native individuals as well. Our exhibit was not produced from a single group of people but rather through multiple networks.

Tuhiwai Smith explains Naming as an act of language preservation and revitalization (1999:157). The use of Indigenous language also has political implications in the renaming of landscapes and geographic locations. In our exhibition, it was established from the onset that the main title would be named in Navajo. Roy decided upon the title with the help of a medicine man that verified that correct use and pronunciation of the selected words. We believed that the tone of the exhibition was determined through the title and that only the Navajo language could adequately illustrate the themes presented therein. Although I do not speak Navajo fluently I understood the importance of its inclusion in the title, as non-Native visitors could appreciate as well. My understanding of the Navajo language and concepts was partially informed through pre-existing familial relationships, most notably my grandparents, who supported my research on the reservation.

Finally, sharing is articulated as an ethical responsibility in research. The author likens sharing to what scholars call, “dissemination.” Sharing entails community involvement in the project development and reproduction of the results in ways that can be understood in the community. The presentation of this knowledge must also “conform to cultural protocols and expectations” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:161). In the case of our exhibition, the product of the collaboration itself was a form of sharing with the broader University of Denver and city of Denver community. Furthermore, knowledge gained from the exhibition process has been shared with Roy and other weaving community

members through our work for Diné be' iina (See Chapter Six for description of our new upcoming exhibition). The final version of this thesis will also be disseminated to the University of Denver, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Navajo Nation Museum, School for Advanced Research and Teec Nos Pos Chapter via Roy Kady.

Considering Collaboration

As stated before, my theorization of our collaborative practice did not occur while we were planning the exhibit. My personal ideas about what collaboration entailed coincide with many of the so-called decolonizing methodologies (outlined in the previous section) such as Sharing, Representing, Reading, and Writing critically, et cetera. These motivations were not directly informed by any particular decolonizing project described by Smith however, Navajo weaving literature and museum exhibitions described in Chapter 3 supported the development of our ideas. Furthermore, examples of other Indigenous museum exhibitions outlined in Chapter 2 served as a practical framework for our curatorial exercise. Aside from these examples I held a personal belief that our collaborative relationship should be built on common values of respect, honesty, openness, and equality—core principles that I initially established as my methodology. My utilization of collaboration is both a response to colonial legacies of privileging non-Navajo perspectives in exhibitions on our “culture” and a way to become more engaged with artists from my community. To situate our exhibition within collaborative discourse I outline major themes within anthropological and related disciplines that informed our work.

Changes to rewrite museum narratives by and on the part of Indigenous individuals coincided with activist anthropology and the New Museology movement; with efforts established by the American Association of Museums towards cultural pluralism in the 1980s. The term has been used to describe a type of relationship, an analytic category, and a methodology. Over the past two decades much has been written on museum collaboration from these different standpoints (Ames 1999, Kahn 2000, Lonetree and Cobb 2003, Peers and Brown 2003, Phillips 2003, Scott and Luby 2007, Chavez Lamar 2008, McMullen 2008, Shannon 2009, Bernstein 2010, Colwell-Chanthaphonh, et al 2010).

The late Michael Ames describes collaboration as a way for museums “to facilitate the cultural empowerment of the less powerful, many of whom are, typically, the peoples which anthropology museums have traditionally studied, collected from and represented (Ames 1990:162). Thus, this definition of collaboration inherently implies a postcolonial identification of a problem and its purpose as a proposed remedy. Furthermore, Ruth Phillips cites the emergence of collaborative exhibitions in the 1990s with a reference to Michael Ames’ description of “two pioneering archaeological exhibits,” *Written in the Earth* and *From Under the Delta*. Both exhibits were co-developed by the University of British Columbia and Coast Salish Communities as a “direct response to the challenge to develop new and equal forms of partnership that was issued to Canadian museums and indigenous peoples by the 1992 report of the national Task Force on Museums and First Peoples” (Phillips 2003:157). Phillips credits the rise of reflexivity within postmodern discourse and increased attention paid to human rights

issues for the shift towards collaborative exhibition practice.

Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* establishes “contact zone” as a term used to describe particular colonial relationships and spaces. Pratt’s definition is born from her goal to “decolonize knowledge” in her literary critique of European travel writing. She explains,

... the term ‘contact zone’ I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict ... ‘contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. [Pratt 1992:6-7]

Pratt’s location of a physical as well as temporal plane for the intersection of colonial powers and its subjects was a concept borrowed by James Clifford (1997) in his analysis of the museum space in a chapter titled “Museums as Contact Zones.” The term, “contact zone” refers not only to a moment of exchange and interaction but also more broadly to that moment’s location within larger economic, cultural, and political structures in society. Clifford defines museums as “the center, a point of gathering” while communities with whom the museum engages are located on “the periphery, area of discovery” (Clifford 1997c:193). Therefore the asymmetrical relationships between museum and community are defined in part by their spatial locations but also their ability to assume power. More broadly, the relationships between museum personnel, source community members, objects also function as “contact zones” (Peers and Brown 2003:5).

Other scholars have utilized Clifford’s definition of “contact zone” to describe collaboration in exhibition making. Michael Ames (2003) describes the development of

two archaeology exhibitions, *From Under the Delta: Wet Site Archaeology from the Fraser Valley* and *Written in Earth*—both opened in 1996— at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in relation to Clifford’s statement that museums need to be more inclusive in their practices or else they remain to be “perceived as merely paternalistic by people whose contact history with museums has been one of exclusion and condescension” (Clifford 1997c:208). Ames outlines the traditional hierarchical structure of museum planning and exhibition development as primarily privileging academic or scholarly knowledge. The collaboration that developed with the particular First Nations communities for the exhibition greatly challenged the museum’s protocol but ultimately led to the establishment of more trusting relationships with community members. The community dictated what type of information would be presented in the exhibitions, even political statements to support the protection of historic sites and increased knowledge about object protection on part of archaeologists and museum professionals (Ames 2003:176). Furthermore, the MOA aimed to redistribute institutional authority and acknowledging the interests of all stakeholders or “partners” from the beginning, and allowed the project to develop “naturally” (Ames 2003:179). From this example and many others, the MOA stands as a model for source community collaboration.

The MOA established an institutional precedent for engagement with communities when it was founded in 1949. Under the direction of Harry and Audrey Hawthorn the MOA sought to engage indigenous artists and community members through collections access and project development. With construction of the new

building in 1976 the MOA continued to refine its commitment to community relationships (Schultz 2011:2). In January 2010 the MOA unveiled its newest collaborative endeavor, the Multiversity Galleries (MVG) with updated visible storage spaces organized according to community knowledge structures that specify who is allowed to view certain cultural items and how they should be displayed. Additionally, as part of the museum's "partnership of the peoples" initiative the Reciprocal Research Network was established to facilitate virtual communication and collaboration between the museum and community members. "Users can build their own collections, collaborate on shared projects, record stories, upload files, hold discussions, research museum collections, and create social networks" (Museum of Anthropology at the University of Columbia 2011). This standard of collaboration demonstrates what can be achieved through the institutionalization of collaborative methodologies.

Elizabeth Scott and Edward M. Luby proposed an alternative view of collaboration at an institutional level in a nation-wide assessment (in the United States) of exactly how museums are communicating, consulting, and maintaining collaborative ties with Native communities. They ask, "Are museums making the necessary organizational adjustments to ensure that their relationships with Indigenous communities are long-lived, healthy, and sustainable?" (Scott and Luby 2007:266). Once again, they frame collaborative practice in reference to NAGPRA protocol, an exercise that cannot be wholly attributed to this legislation. Still, their interest in analyzing the efficacy of organizational procedure that contributes towards long-lasting partnerships sheds light on the complexities of broader institutional behaviors that ultimately dictate collaborative

practice, regardless of one's personal opinions about the merits of such relations. The survey, conducted in May 2005, was distributed to 158 museums that were identified as either possessing Native American collections, programming or had indicted repatriation activities in some way.⁵

The survey asked respondents about the extent of their relationships with Native communities, how effective current organizational structure such as advisory boards were in managing these relationships, and how information on such interactions moved through the museum's organization. The survey also asked respondents how information concerning interactions was documented, whether or not policies were present, and how policies were created in the institution. [Scott and Luby 2007:271]

The findings of the survey (with a response rate of 40%) indicated that the most common interaction between museums and Native communities were through public programming and advisory boards. And while 80% elucidated the overwhelming benefits of working with Native communities, the majority of museums do not have official policies or procedures for collaboration. Based on these results collaboration is perceived as an ideal standard that has yet to be institutionalized, a formality that would signify a larger social commitment to maintaining collaborative relationships as a standard, not just an abstract aim. This study reveals yet again, the complexity of defining and achieving collaboration at an individual and institutional level.

As the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) were signed in 1989 and 1990 respectively, a renewed set of questions were raised about how Native material objects and human remains should be handled in museum collections in the United

⁵ Only museums accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM) were considered for the survey for the purposes of conducting a more equal assessment.

States. Newly established protocol under the two pieces of legislation mandated consultation with Native communities about their cultural material. These considerations contributed towards discussions of collaboration. While legally sanctioned consultation was not a prerequisite for collaborative discourse, the precedent established by NAGPRA no doubt brought the theme of collaboration as a new methodology to the fore. Elizabeth Scott and Edward Luby similarly suggest, “that while NAGPRA is an important part of the relationship between museums and Native communities, repatriation does not define the extent of such relationships” (Scott and Luby 2007:277). Collaboration is a term with multiple definitions and applications. Two decades since the passage of NAGPRA the legally mandated process of consultation has developed into an ethical precedent of collaboration. While the museum community’s increased awareness of Native American claims to cultural property and human remains since the passage of NAGPRA has contributed to the formation of more collaborative relationships, the active role that Native tribal communities has adopted in the treatment and repatriation of their material indicates that collaborative methodologies cannot be solely attributed to legislation. Several questions that are raised now include: Whose authoritative voices should be privileged from the community? What are the stakes for both parties and how can equality of a partnership be measured? Is it really collaboration if proposed and organized by the museum institution? What does collaboration look like with an entire community or tribal government rather than an individual?

A critique raised by Bruce Bernstein about the evaluation of NAGPRA is that “the past 20 years have been more about product than process. Funding has largely been

used to write and file reports and get us to the negotiation or return, but what of the vast landscape that lies beyond?” (Bernstein 2010:196). Following scholarship on collaboration by Jennifer Shannon (2009) and Miriam Kahn (2000) the collaborative experience that I describe in the following chapter focuses largely on the process of creating a “product,” our exhibition. While my motivation for this emphasis has more to do with countering the tendency for exhibitions of Navajo weaving to highlight product over process, I realized later that my writing procedure also mirrored this exhibitionary strategy.

The descriptive process that Bernstein insists upon has been outlined by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson in their book, *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities* (2008a). In this co-edited volume the authors confront many current ethical and pragmatic concerns of conducting collaboration in the field of archaeology. They lay out a model for evaluating collaborative projects along a “collaborative continuum.” Collaboration is thus conceived as a wide range of activities with multiple stakeholders for multiple audiences, all of which are gauged in terms of their degree of equal involvement between all parties. The authors explain,

On one end lies resistance; in the middle, participation; and on the other end, collaboration. We propose six 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-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008b: 10]

The visualization of these ideas is presented in the table shown below:

Table 1.1. Collaboration Conceived as a Continuum of Practices

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

Table 1 - Collaboration continuum table (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008b:11)

In realizing the goals of our exhibition for both community education and “authentic” artist representation, our combined efforts fall into the collaboration side of the spectrum. It is within this end of the continuum where a particular investigation about the efficacy of collaborative exhibition practice as a decolonizing methodology is analyzed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

Several other scholars and museum practitioners have also discussed the potentials of collaboration as an “ideal” methodology. Early on in this broad discussion, Ruth Phillips (2003) situated two particular modes of collaborative practice, community-based exhibitions and multi-vocal exhibitions, that are defined either as mostly community derived or community plus other non-community member originated exhibitions. While the author’s analysis of these modes questions the creation and distribution of knowledge in exhibitions (often arguing for a sharing of Indigenous and museological knowledge in the museum space), an assumption that museum professionals are not also Indigenous community members is implicitly made. Since then, a proliferation of tribal museums and a growing demographic of Native museum

professionals (as demonstrated by the establishment of Tribal Historic Preservation programs in 1992 and the establishment of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums in 2010) have necessitated an acknowledgement of the new possibility that a Native person may also find themselves working in a “Western” mainstream museum employing the same standards of stewardship and conservation as any other museum professional. Ann McMullen, Curator and head of collections research at NMAI, problematizes the oversimplification of the collaborative role played by Native communities and community members:

The differences between museum work with Native communities rather than individuals are considerable—in what is gained and the processes involved ... however, individuals’ motivations often involve their personal status with respect to tradition and developing relationships with museum members. Work with communities—especially where tribal approval is sought, representatives are tribally appointed, and the results face review by tribal councils—is far more complex. [McMullen 2008:56]

Indeed, the relationship between a curator from a mainstream museum with one community member may look very different than a relationship with a family, a community, or an entire tribe. I appreciate the complexity that McMullen paints in her analysis of her own collaborative practice. In this particular article, “The Currency of Consultation and Collaboration,” she self-reflexively describes the challenges of collaboration that develop when two stakeholders—the museum institution and the Indigenous community—have differing perceptions of payment for consulting “services” and the value that such payment holds for each group. Furthermore, McMullen points to how an assumption cannot be made about general protocol for “services rendered” with Native community members. Every individual may have their own opinions about how

their knowledge is shared and how payment is figured accordingly. Her assessments suggest that museums should take a more active role in asking what their community partners think about appropriate compensation and what kind of value they place on their time and knowledge. Such examples cause me to reflect on my own work and question more broadly how all museum professionals that work in collaborative relationships should reconsider how their partners are compensated and if such awards are understood mutually.

She states, “as museum people, we may choose to present ‘warm and fuzzy’ descriptions of our work, but as anthropologists, we have a wider obligation to provide more critical self-analyses” (McMullen 2008:57). While my description of the collaborative process in the preceding and following chapters verges on so-called “warm and fuzzy” narratives I must add that my “self-locating” within the exhibition themes and process contributed to my narration style (including poems and personal reactions to experiences in our planning process). Once again, I consider my role in the process as a character in the “narrative” like any other participant.

Furthermore, McMullen situates her discussion of collaboration within anthropological theory. She describes the “postmodern turn” as the stage upon which museum consultation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples has been played out. McMullen argues, “as anthropology has become post-colonial, so have many museum endeavors, but museums’ often ponderous institutional infrastructures have been slower to changes than individual researchers” (McMullen 2008:54). However, many Native museum practitioners have identified such changes outside the academy and associated

theoretical classifications. For instance, Joycelyn Wedll (2000:89), Anishinaabe, describes the collaboration between the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) and her community, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, in the development of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum located on the reservation in 1960. She notes,

The Mille Lacs Indian Museum has a unique statue: it is a state historic site that also functions as a local history museum with active community participation. While the museum's administrative and financial support is provided by MHS, the history of the Mille Lacs Band is researched, interpreted, and brought to life by the people who know it best: Mille Lacs Band members. [Wedll 2000:91]

Like Wedll's description, collaboration has been increasingly discussed from the vantage point of Native museum professionals theorizing on their own work both within and outside their tribal communities. Nevertheless, exhibits such as the one curated by Chicago Native community members in the *Our Lives* gallery at the National Museum of the American Indian have shown that community-curation does not even have to be confined to tribal boundaries. The definitions of "Indigenous," "tribal," "community," et cetera are just as varied as the types of collaborative projects described in the literature and represent the diversity of "Native" voices present in the museum community.

An example of Native museum scholarship has been most prominently demonstrated in the publication, *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations* (Lonetree and Cobb 2008). The NMAI is reflected upon as an institution, a model for community collaboration, and a representative for "Native America." Key players in the Native museum world such as Amy Lonetree, Amanda Cobb, Paul Chaat Smith, Cynthia Chavez-Lamar, and others contribute to collaborative discourse through

various essays that offer both critique and praise of NMAI's development, interpretation, and efficacy to represent Native cultures and issues across the Western hemisphere.

In this volume, Paul Chaat Smith (2008: 133), curator at NMAI, reflects on his collaborative experience with fellow Native artist and curator, Jolene Rickard. His discussion presents a challenging situation to how collaboration has been typically described. Here, the collaboration includes two Native curators, from two distinct communities, representing two distinct organizations (Smith at NMAI and Rickard then at State University of New York in Buffalo), and working with multiple other Native scholars, artists, and individuals. The dichotomy of museum professional and Native community member does not apply in this circumstance. In his description, their relationship is conveyed as a dialectic of ideas about Native histories, representational strategies, and cultural interpretations. Smith's narratives move between their shared visions and their independent beliefs about display methods and what sort of information should be highlighted. This is expressed as shifts in language between "I," "she," and "us." This sort of "flexible" narration particularly appealed to me and is recreated in my discussion of our exhibition process. There is not a single "Native" voice and even with the acknowledgement that there are many voices, there is rarely consensus. Smith summarizes the multi-vocality of the NMAI-centered debate,

We are at the very beginning of that conversation, and like any difficult conversation, it can be rough going, especially at first. Let's keep arguing, because at least that means we're talking. And of course by now you know I'm talking also about arguments among Indians, not just those boring arguments between Indians and cowboys. But we'll get better at this, because we have to. [Smith 2008:143]

While Roy and I shared many similar ideas about how to approach the exhibition planning process, we also conveyed distinct differences in our implementation of certain ideas. I attempt to demonstrate both sides of the process, the challenges and the successes we experienced in our collaboration.

Finally, an important characteristic of any collaboration is the simple act of practicing humility. I perceive this consideration to be more of a moral imperative than anything else and one that cannot be legally mandated or administered by institutional protocol. Cynthia Chavez Lamer, the current director of the Indian Arts Research Center and former lead curator of the NMAI Our Lives gallery, articulates this sentiment in a personal reflection,

Growing up in San Felipe Pueblo, New Mexico, I entered the communities similar to the way I am when at home: I listened, showed respect for the unfamiliar, and knew when to be unobtrusive. I approached this experience with humility, naïveté, and honesty and let the community curators know that we had to figure out together how to get this accomplished. In this way, I suppose I leveled the playing field so that the NMAI was not presented or perceived as the experts in collaboration, except that we knew the technicalities of putting an exhibit together. (Chavez Lamar 2008:152)

Likewise, my inspirational guide for collaboration was initially built on the simple principle of basic human courtesy, which of course is a subjective claim. However, the application of theoretical models and the analysis of institutional collaboration is perhaps just a broader rationalization of this ethical standard. The combination of the two perspectives could be the best possible manifestation of collaborative practice.

Methods

My research project initially began with an interest in Navajo weavers and classifications of gender in Navajo society. Through internet research on Navajo weaving exhibitions (see Appendix A) I became more interested in the popularity of the topic in the museum venue. In my preliminary research, I learned of two museum exhibits, *Weaving in the Margins* and *Men Who Weave*, which focused solely on Navajo male weavers. Like many others, I held a common assumption that weaving was a traditionally female task. However, through my chance discovery of an archived news article in the *Navajo Times* about the *Men Who Weave* exhibition I became increasingly interested in the topic and decided to focus on the representational strategies each of the exhibits and museum institutions employed. My interest in collaborative methodologies did not develop until I conducted my first interview with Roy Kady. My theoretical orientation towards postcolonial strategies naturally fit in with collaboration and likewise, critical indigenous methodologies. Here I describe the various methods I utilized in my research conducted from September 2009 through December 2010.

Participant Observation

From October 2009 through December 2010 I attended “spin-off” events at the Teec Nos Pos chapter house. Roy Kady invited me to my first spin-off after we had spoken on the phone about the possibility of meeting for an interview. The community event brought weavers from neighboring communities of the four corners region. I was able to meet many weavers and observe them as they carded wool, set up their looms, and

share their weaving with each other. I was only able to attend two other spin-off events due to its remote location from my residence in Colorado. Nevertheless, I enjoyed participating in these community forums that allowed me to observe Roy's leadership and interaction with other weavers and to learn more about the weaving process.

Another very important aspect of my research was researching Navajo weaving exhibitions. My observation of these various representations of Navajo weaving provided me the foundation for my background research I viewed as many exhibitions as I could during my research schedule timeframe. I documented each visit by taking several non-flash photographs of the exhibit cases, text panels, object labels, and general views of the layout of the exhibit. In total, I was able to visit and document three exhibitions. In addition, I studied research and text panel material from two other exhibitions (all of which I discuss in Chapter 3). The following list shows the museums I visited and/or studied:

- *Men Who Weave (Diné Dah' Atl'ó): A Revival in Diné Bikéyah*
- *Weaving in the Margins*
- *Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes*
- *Diyogí t'áá bil 'Ánooséél Generations*
- *Woven to Wear: Navajo and Hopi Textiles from The Durango Collection*

Semi-structured Interviews

While visiting the *Navajo Weaving: Diamonds, Dreams, Landscapes, Diyogí t'áá bil 'Ánooséél Generations*, and *Woven to Wear: Navajo and Hopi Textiles from the Durango Collection* exhibition installations contributed useful background information, my decision to interview museum staff about *Men Who Weave (Diné Dah' Atl'ó): A Revival in Diné Bikéyah* and *Weaving in the Margins* was based on the fact that these

exhibitions were no longer on view. Therefore, I was dependent on the personal observations and opinions of those involved in the exhibitions, museum staff, and weaving participants. Initially, I intended to interview several weavers about their involvement in the two exhibitions but contacting the weavers proved to be a much more difficult task than anticipated. Based on a list of 21 weavers from both exhibitions, I only was able to contact five weavers and only able to schedule an interview with one weaver, Roy Kady. Therefore, my original intention to conduct a research project on the multiple perspectives of representing and being represented was modified when the information I first sought was unavailable. Based on my successful interview with Roy I decided to refocus my research on the process of creating an exhibition with him. Our installment built on the previous male weaver exhibitions and the analysis was centered on Roy's input about all three exhibitions. I conducted a total of three interviews at his community in Teec Nos Pos (see Appendix C and D). Each interview was recorded and transcribed with Roy's permission according to Institutional Review Board protocol (see Appendix E). Additional information from Roy was shared through email and telephone conversations. However, all direct quotes presented in this thesis were taken from our recorded conversations.

I conducted interviews with museum staff at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture who were involved in the *Weavings in the Margins* exhibition. Former and current staff interviews included: Louise Stiver, Joyce Begay-Foss, and director Shelby Tisdale (whose interview was not used in this thesis because she not contribute to the exhibition). Also, I conducted interviews with staff at the Navajo Nation Museum whom

were involved in the *Men Who Weave (Diné Dah' Atl'ó): A Revival in Diné Bikéyah* exhibition: Clarenda Begay and Manuelito Wheeler (who did not contribute to the *Men Who Weave* exhibition but offered commentary about the museum's overall mission and exhibition practice). I used the same set of questions for each staff member at both institutions (see Appendix F). The questions I created were meant to solicit staff perceptions of how the material was displayed, how the exhibition represented the weavers, and the process of collaborating with the weavers in the exhibition.

Archival and Secondary Source Research

During September 2009 I visited the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture to research exhibition materials produced by former curator Louise Stiver. I poured through several files of articles, photocopies, correspondence, and other print material used for exhibition research and design. With Stiver's permission I used the contact list she provided to contact weavers for interviews in October 2009.

In October 2009 and January 2010 (on two separate research trips) I visited the Navajo Nation Museum to conduct interviews and to research the text panel materials from the *Men Who Weave* exhibition. I documented all the text panels by taking photographs that I referred back to in my analysis of exhibition visual material in this thesis.

Additional information about Navajo weaving exhibitions was gathered through Internet searches (see Appendix A) and library research. Books published on Navajo weaving provided a greater understanding of how the art form has been presented as both

an expression of cultural continuity and as a commodity. My impressions and analyses of these representations are presented in my literature review found in Chapter 3.

Surveys

To assess audience reaction to our exhibition, *Ná'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*, one-page surveys were distributed to visitors who attended the opening night lecture on April 2, 2010 (see Appendix G). Information gathered from the surveys aided in my analyses of public reception to the exhibition and for use by the Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME), one of the sponsors of the event. The evaluations revealed demographic data about the audience and may help the CME to better engage this community in future Native-themed campus events. Results also may be beneficial as supplemental data to support future funding for CME events as well as statistical data included in the CME annual report.

The overall goal of the evaluation was to measure how well the event was able to:

- Assemble members of the DU Native American Community with members of the broader Denver Native American Community in addition to all non-Native community members interested in Native arts and culture;
- Contribute to the desire to learn more about the Navajo culture, weaving, and/or Native themes in general;
- Communicate the message of the exhibit and gauge what parts of the exhibit/opening visitors responded to;

Therefore the survey provided the following types of information:

- Demographic: affiliation, age group, tribal affiliation (if applicable), etc.
- Behavioral: how often the visitor attends Native lectures/exhibits and if they would be likely to attend future events.

- Attitudinal: how the visitor feels about Native museum representation, what their level of knowledge and interest is in Native issues, how well the event created a sense of community of Native Americans for both Natives and non-Natives, etc.

A summary and analysis of the survey results is elucidated in the following chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

Ná'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady

As identified in Chapter 4, my interest in the planning process in the exhibition gradually shifted from representational strategies towards a particular mode of relationship that has been under-represented in scholarly work on collaboration, namely between a Native curator and a member of the curator's tribal community. While cultivating interpersonal relations is an obvious approach to gaining respect and trust within a community (Native or non-Native), its place within collaborative methodology has been presumed as a given although not thoroughly explored between two individuals of the same tribal community. In this chapter, I discuss the development of my masters exhibition, *Ná'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*, that took place from October 2009 and culminating in the installment and opening in April 2010. Specifically, I reflect on my initial meeting with Roy Kady, his experiences in past exhibitions, and our mutual decision to create a new exhibition together. Quotes included in this chapter are taken from various taped interviews conducted between October 2009 and December 2010.

I explore our exhibition experience as a collaborative process of meaning-making and authority-sharing in curatorial practice, as well as a navigation of our distinct Navajo identities in relation to one another. Furthermore, I identify the ways in which we

confronted various problems of representation in the development of our exhibition design and describe the successes and challenges we experienced throughout. These considerations speak to larger dilemmas Native community members face in the representation of their communities within the museum venue and what these experiences imply about collaboration as a decolonizing methodology raised throughout my thesis.

The Genesis

*Northbound, we rolled across the barren desert
My aunt and I in my little Corolla
From our home in Window Rock
Past Wheatfield lake and thru the pines of Tsaile
Watching the landscape turn red as we sped through Rock Point
Seeing the pick-up trucks parked beside old trailers and hogans
We slowed only for the sheep and barking dogs that crossed our path
On this same road I'd traveled so many times before
Ever since my childhood, these colors have been familiar
Some might only notice the lack of water, or community infrastructure
But to me it was nostalgic
And not in any quixotic sort of way
But rather as an abstract memory
This land is home to our ancestors
And with it carries the stories I seek to hear
So finally, as we approached Teec Nos Pos
With only a gas station and a trading post nearby
I was anxious to meet the kind weaver I heard on the telephone
Not yet knowing our interview would turn into a fruitful idea
That we might plan an exhibition together hundreds of miles away
And so it began*

When I first met Roy Kady, fourth generation master weaver and Teec Nos Pos Chapter House President, at a local weaving guild “spin-off” event on the Navajo reservation of northern Arizona I was impressed by his capacity to listen, as well as his ability to teach and share his knowledge with the other weavers. This initial observation

of his character left a lasting impression on me, as appropriate practice for exhibition curatorship and on a deeply personal level as I yearned to learn more about a Diné weaving community through my research.

After a meal of mutton stew and Navajo tortillas the other weavers started to vacate the chapter house for the afternoon. There, in the community room we sat down and began our interview. I had prepared several questions for our interview but as hours passed I realized I was much more intrigued by the stories he told without my prompting. He related to me the origin histories and stories of our people, some I knew and some I had not heard before—and so I just listened.

What I feel about being a weaver is carrying on the legacy of my grandfather. It's fulfilling, it's my passion, as it was his. It's a privilege, a gift from Spider Man ... My grandfather was the one who taught me the creation stories and wherever I go I realize that's where my heart is.

Roy spoke extensively about his passion for weaving and the important connection it has to his family. As a male weaver, he cited the special relationship he had with his grandfather who was also a weaver. He emphasized the ceremonial importance of weaving practice, especially for male weavers. Hastiin Klah,⁶ medicine man and the most well known male weaver, is an inspirational figure for Roy and many other weavers that still sing the traditional weaving songs:

Men were knitters and were present in every part of the weaving process. I think it's only because it's been where Calvary men wrote in their diaries when they came upon a Navajo encampment and always saw the women at the loom while the husband was out hunting, gathering, providing and they never saw the male part of the weaving process so they figured that it must be women's work.

⁶ Hastiin Klah was also a prominent figure in the *Men Who Weave* exhibition, see Chapter 3.

Roy offers compelling insight into external perceptions of Navajo gender roles. He recognizes that current gender definitions may have been perverted by outside Western influence such as traders who saw weaving as a domestic task and therefore focused their marketing around the female weaver. Once the seed of “traditional gender roles” was planted, he suggests that many Navajo people have perpetuated the notion of solely female oriented weaving practice. He further states that the duality of Spider Woman and Spider Man as the creators and teachers of our culture’s weaving knowledge represents the duality of male and female gender roles in this tradition.

Furthermore, he raises issue of how Navajo weavings have been commodified according to the needs of an outside influenced market: “If you look in a book, a lot of it is catered to the buyer. It’s become less and less for ourselves ... it’s detached from the real meaning of weaving *diyogí*, the name of the weaving when it’s completed. *Dah’list’ó*, is when it’s still in the loom and in the frame.”⁷ Prior to this conversation I had heard of weavings referred to as *diyogí*, but the term *dah’list’ó* was a new concept to me. The distinction between the “finished woven product” and the “weaving in process” within the Navajo language is a characterization often overlooked by scholars that tends to focus on the weaving only as *diyogí*. I was particularly captivated by this new knowledge and would later use this seldom-explored notion of *dah’list’ó* as a guiding principal in our exhibition as we decided to focus on the *journey* of Navajo weaving rather than the destination or final product.

⁷ Erika Bsumek explores concepts of meaning and Navajo self-representations through the commoditization of Navajo art forms in her book, *Navajo Culture in the Market Place: 1868-1940* (2008).

The concept of *journey* also became more apparent as he discussed his relationship to his flock of Churro sheep. Roy currently raises several color varieties of the Churro breed whose wool he later spins and makes into yarn for his weavings. He speaks of them like they were his children—not just as a responsibility, but also as a labor of love and respect. He relates the entire process of sheep rearing and herding to the melody of weaving chants, a traditional practice that especially carries ceremonial significance for male weavers. However, he laments that it is no longer a mainstream tradition. Still, he believes it is an essential component to weaving and sheep herding: “There is a whole healing process of herding sheep and weaving. If you’ve ever heard the weaving songs, they are quite frankly some of the most beautiful songs you could ever hear and they are becoming quite rare.”



Image 8 – Roy Kady spinning Churro wool. Photo taken by author 2010.

Due to Roy’s special interest in weaving chants, the title of the exhibition would later be named in reference to the deity Spider Man and the associated songs: *Na’ashjé’ii Bikq’ Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider)—A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy*

Kady. Likewise, the definition of Roy's weaving journey in the exhibition became also an exploration of his personal journey in life as he reconnected with his Navajo heritage when he came back to the reservation nearly two decades ago:

I think I used to be lost. I would ask my mom, where's my *bits'éeé*' (umbilical cord), thinking it was just a joke. But she probably knew I wasn't serious enough to know where my *bits'éeé*' was until she finally told me one day, 'you know where it's at because I notice when you come home the first place you go to is the sheep corral. I buried your *bits'éeé*' in the middle of the sheep corral. You [should] go there and make your connection... what you need to do is get down and roll around.' And that's what makes you a strong person, so [that is what] I did. That was about 15 or 16 years ago when I came home.

I began to perceive of Roy not merely as an informant or co-collaborator but also as a mentor of Navajo origin stories and alternative histories since he was from a different region of the reservation as my family. We shared many personal stories of our upbringing—some revealed similar insights and many others that highlighted our differences. Roy grew up on the reservation speaking Navajo and learning “traditional” practices. I grew up in Western Colorado making only monthly visits to the reservation as a child. Our age difference also marks a generational division between us. While Roy is certainly younger than my grandparents from whom I had learned most of my understanding of Navajo beliefs, I also approached Roy as “elder” on a personal level. This category of relationship contributed towards my desire to simply act as a translator his ideas as I did not feel comfortable asserting too much “authority” over him. On the other hand, a complete abandonment of my power in favor of his authority was unrealistic and would not have been collaboration. A collaborative relationship entails authority sharing by both parties according to the terms each individual has established.

For us, our relationship was built upon the understanding that, once again, I was a facilitator of his vision, not an authoritative transcriber of his art and experiences.

Discussing Museum Representation

I was most interested in Roy's perception of Navajo weaving and "culture" displayed in the museum venue. His curiosity about the life of weaving and its creator was not dissimilar to how I felt about woven pieces I saw on view in various exhibitions. I most often wondered how a particular rug came to be hung in a gallery, perhaps with a text label that read "artist unknown." In these cases, I would experience a pang of sadness knowing that it may have been initially secured under questionable ethical circumstances such as a removal from a grave or stolen property (although I trust that most museums have complied with NAGPRA and such items are no longer in the museum collection or on display at the very least). Still, the unknown history of an object is the most troubling on a personal level and often the most challenging for a curator to "interpret." However, hearing Roy speak of his feelings about the unknown pieces reiterated my desire to be a curator; to translate these reflections into the text labels and present them not merely as objects, but beings that still have power to evoke strong emotions in the viewer. Roy said,

Whenever I see some of the old pieces, I imagine the use of it. How a person wore it, slept in it, and sometimes when I'm viewing them I feel first for them. Knowing what they might have went through in their life and I feel saddened. A lot of times I also wonder where those blankets came from because some might have been in burials and who really knows. In that sense I do get feelings that maybe I shouldn't be in its presence. And then there are some that I feel talk to me and say, 'study me because this is something that you can use in your teaching.'

The familiarity that Roy expresses about his weavings demonstrates a vivid emotional connection that many weavers experience with their creations. Thus, to refer to them as artifacts or even fine art pieces does not acknowledge the personal relationship the weaver carries with the weaving:

There's an interesting phrase my mom used one time, when you finish a weaving, 'it's like giving birth.' It is really hard to part with it. I felt that many times. You see the child in your hand[s] and you see the life that you have given. To just give it away and sell it is really painful sometimes.

Based on this personal connection that Roy has cultivated with his weavings I asked him if he ever felt that certain types of museum displays were not culturally appropriate. He responded that he hadn't seen any weaving displays that blatantly offended him however he expressed concern for the well being of the weavers and the possibility of stolen material from gravesites.⁸

As a young Navajo woman I understood his reluctance to view certain older weavings that may have been removed from a burial. The commonly known Navajo aversion to anything related to death (such as objects affiliated with a burial site) comes from creation stories. There is a belief that *ch'iindis* (evil spirits) remain in and near the body after death and thus one must not touch the body or associated items. As a child I never completely understood this belief, as I am a naturally curious student of the processes of life, including death. Nevertheless, I find myself sometimes overwhelmed

⁸ While there is no way to ascertain the exact amount of material taken from Native American graves in the United States, it is safe to assume that at least some stolen material made its way into museum collections (perhaps unbeknownst to the museum institution at the time it was accessioned). One example concerning the removal of Navajo textiles from a gravesite is recorded in a Federal Register NAGPRA notice (FR Doc E7-12711:Volume 72, Number 126) dated July 2, 2007. According to the notice, two plain-weave diyugi-style Navajo blankets (along with five other items) were removed from a gravesite in Montezuma County, CO in 1954. The items were donated to the University of Colorado Museum, Boulder in 1959. The items were determined to be Native American associated funerary objects (the identity of the buried individual remains unknown) but the university has actively consulted with representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe of the Southern Ute Reservation, Colorado; Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation, Utah; and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe of the Ute Mountain Reservation, Colorado, New Mexico & Utah.

with uneasiness in the presence of historical objects that I feel have experienced a traumatic event:

There are some blankets, upon close inspection; you really know that these weavings are coming from *distage*, which are burial places. Those are the ones that I don't like the feelings that I get from it and I choose to stay far from it. Those are the ones that make me want to enlighten the curator and tell them what this piece is and what it means, it should continue the process of deterioration just like the wearer [that] has been released. There is a ceremony that is now performed before I give it to the individual, because there is a connection [between himself and his weaving].

Reflecting on these statements I understood more profoundly the connection that weavers, like Roy, had with their woven creations. They are imbued with the spirit of the maker, and proper display by museum professionals must bear this in mind. Roy believes they are not merely pieces of art, like a painting or piece of fine china, but rather embodiments of the creator's spirit with particular prayers and blessings. For this reason, Roy no longer regularly sells his pieces but chooses instead to weave for gift-giving or special commissions where he can arrange the proper ceremony upon completion of weaving. His "art-making" process is not detached from other facets of his life; rather it is integral to his identity as a Navajo male, shepherd, community leader, and teacher.

Reflecting on Past Exhibitions

Roy, as a well-known weaver within the Navajo weaving community, has participated in several exhibitions and art shows. The prior exhibitions that focused solely on Navajo male weavers, *Weaving in the Margins* and *Men Who Weave (Diné Dah' Atl'ó): A Revival in Diné Bikyah*, both included weavings by Roy. I asked him about his experience working with the museum staff in each of the exhibits. He shared with me

advice he gave to museum staff at both institutions: “an exhibit should really come from the individuals that you want to exhibit.” This idea would remain omnipresent in my mind, when later developed our exhibition together. I further asked him particularly what sort of information or stories were important to him to share with the public. As a male weaver he related the importance of sharing their perspective due to the many misconceptions that persist about their role in Navajo society:

Not all male weavers are the same so each one will be unique in how they started weaving, how they weave now, and how they see their weaving in the future. That is something I know I wanted to portray in these exhibits. When you read in the books, men are not allowed to weave, that is not true. It's a taboo to be a male weaver, totally not true.

Roy was well aware of the misrepresentation of Navajo gender roles within the literature and likewise, in many exhibitions in mainstream museums. For him, his participation in past exhibitions was not to promote his own work necessarily but rather to dispel certain stereotypes about male weavers. His didactic cause was to promote the idea of each weaver as a unique artist, which he believes both museum institutions achieved sufficiently. He describes how the other weavers featured in the exhibitions came from different faith backgrounds, “some were born-again Christians, some practice traditional (Navajo) spirituality, and some juggle between the two.” I found it particularly interesting that Roy decided to describe the “uniqueness” of the other weavers in terms of their spiritual identity. I naively expected him to elaborate on the variation of their rug designs or even their various geographic locations on the reservation but his decision to mention religion highlights the importance of ceremonial custom within his own weaving practice; however, this does imply that other Navajo weavers practice the same type of

ceremonial customs such as chants like Roy. He does not perceive of his religion as a distinct practice from his weaving process therefore he chose to classify other weavers also according to their spectrum of belief. While the two previous exhibitions do not highlight religious custom in the same way that Roy defines his work, he nevertheless thought both exhibits “needed to happen” and he was “very glad they occurred.” The other exhibits, by virtue of being representative of many artists, had to be more inclusive of multiple ideas about ceremonial practice in weaving.

Once again, an important cause for Roy in his educational leadership is to challenge misconceptions about Navajo gender roles. He related to me how this issue became apparent during the initial planning meeting for the *Men Who Weave (Diné Dah’ Atl’ó): A Revival in Diné Bikyah* exhibition. He noted that all types of male weavers attended the meeting: married, single, straight, gay, transgender, et cetera. However, many weavers who were married decided not to participate in the exhibition because of the public perception, even among “modern Navajos, that all male weavers were gay or transgender.” Roy didn’t perceive participating in the exhibit as a problem because he says, “I am comfortable with myself.”

As a group, the weavers who decided to participate in the exhibit were given the task of creating an exhibit title. One of the original versions of the title was *Nadleeh Diné Dah’ Atl’ó*. Roy asked the group, “what does *nadleeh* mean?” Everybody referred to *nadleeh* as gay or men who act as women. He responded, “*nadleeh* are actually hermaphrodites” as a clarification, and referred specifically to a period of male and female separation in Navajo creation stories where the *nadleeh* performed tasks of both

genders and helped both groups survive. Roy said, “I am not *nadleeh* but I can be referred to as *nadleeh bi’iilni’*” (the one that acts like *nadleeh*). He further explained that title would be inappropriate for him because he is not a hermaphrodite. He again asked the group if that was the title they desired. Thus, they decided on *Diné Dah’ At’ó* (removing the word *nadleeh* from the title) which simply translates as, “men who weave.” He recounted how this was the first time that many had reconsidered what the term *nadleeh* meant. The most popular association of the term is with Hastiin Klah who was in fact a hermaphrodite. For this reason, Klah was able to perform traditional male duties as a medicine man (learning chants and sand painting designs associated with ceremonial customs) in addition to weaving.

Roy has adopted a personal cause to educate others, especially Navajo people, about discrepancies that have developed between creation stories and modern day interpretations of “traditional” concepts, such as *nadleeh*. Likewise, this story enlightened my perspectives of Navajo gender roles as I had previously not known the full implications of the term. What I found to be most inspiring is how Roy utilizes creation stories to teach tolerance and respect, in this example an increased awareness and open-mindedness about alternative genders and stereotypes. Sharing his weaving art provides a medium to teach about creation stories in a contemporary context because he believes “it is all interconnected.”

Roy stressed the importance of sharing traditional Navajo knowledge and weaving in museum exhibitions because of its potential to be seen by a broader demographic (than his home community). He reiterated, “It will help our upcoming

generations to understand themselves, their people, their ancestors. It's a missing link even for ourselves this day and age and to show how the male weavers fit into Navajo society." Indeed, these words became a guiding principle when we agreed to co-create our new and innovative exhibition.

Planning a New Exhibit Together

There is an exhibit in my mind that I've dreamt about several times and that was to create a collection of weaving around being a male figure in the weaving world. It would represent life—in that spiral circle of life that we believe. - Roy Kady

As Roy responded to my question, if given the opportunity how he would create an exhibition on male weavers, he related to me a vision of a solo exhibit that had manifested in his dreams. He discussed the spiral of life as exemplified in the circular pattern of a Navajo ceremonial basket. He gestured the helical motion that spreads outward from the center of the basket and how it represents the symbolic nexus of the Navajo universe. Inspired by his vision, I told Roy that I could help him recreate his idea through my master's exhibition project:

Teresa Montoya: If this is something you want to do because you have this dream that makes it easy, because I would be just going along with what you already want, as opposed to creating something out of thin air.

Roy Kady: But you have to help me see the dream too, in terms of working together, which may mean you coming out here to herd sheep with me so I can show you what I'm talking about. It takes that I think.

TM: I would really like to do that.

RK: Yes, because in order to understand and talk and write about something you have to have been there to experience it.

I further explained to Roy my desire for collaboration as an equal partnership of power; however, I acknowledge that this dynamic fluctuated depending on the task. For example, I made several trips to the reservation to meet with him on my own bill—a situation where I willingly sacrificed my time for planning purposes. On the other hand, Roy transported most of the objects in his sister’s borrowed vehicle to Denver for the exhibition and donated one of his lambs for the opening reception (with exception of some of the borrowed weavings that were sent via mail). The notion of equal partnership is a flexible term here and we both assumed the responsibility that we would each bear certain financial costs not covered by fundraising.

I did not perceive my curatorship as a position of authority to dictate all decisions in the exhibit planning process; nor was I seeking only a “stamp of approval” from the Native artist. However, I did have authority to negotiate the terms of our exhibition with the department. In this way I referred to myself, very specifically, as a facilitator of Roy’s ideas. He described the opportunity to create this exhibit as “his calling.” Thus began our collaboration; defining exactly what this sort of relationship entailed developed alongside our exhibition planning process.

I asked Roy what he imagined to be the main themes of his exhibit. He responded that he desired his exhibit to be a dedication and to pay homage to male weavers before him. Once again, he wanted to dispel the stereotype that anything done in the home has to be done by a woman. He has observed the same themes represented in “the books, the media ... I don’t want this exhibit to be for commercial outlet. I would want it to be for the schools, for the youth, the community, and for the value of education.” When I asked

him specifically what type of exhibit he would like to create he described the importance of tactile experience for him as a weaver and likewise, an experience the museum visitor should share as well:

For me, what the real purpose of weaving is to feel it, be part of it. As a weaver that's how it is. So in this exhibit, if possible, [I wish] people could feel them. If I weave blankets, that have these stories, they're not just going to sit there on the mannequin. I would want to show them how a man wears his blanket and why. Actually be able to take it off and wear it. Because the way you wrap it is like someone holding you. To be able to portray that is something you don't usually see.

From the very beginning, we both agreed that the sensory experience of the weaving process should be highlighted within the gallery space. I was particularly attracted to this idea as a museum studies student because I wanted to present weaving in a non-conventional way. I found it particularly important to depict weaving from Roy's perspective: "I think it would be difficult but I think it would be great that it happens, that our exhibit consists of only utilitarian and ceremonial weavings, that doesn't include sand paintings." Sand painting textiles were made popular by Hastiin Klah due to his dual-identity as a medicine man and weaver. However, imagery presented in sand painting textiles (as replicas of sand paintings created during particular Navajo ceremonies) is a controversial subject for many Navajo people. Some believe that the imagery should not have been made permanent in the textile form because of the powerful energy that such images produce while others believe that the imagery alone (removed from a ceremonial context) no longer carries spiritual energy.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter Roy expressed a desire not to display sand painting textiles in our exhibition. Rather, he described several of the horse

implements he had woven that he wanted to include in the exhibit. Roy's weaving falls into a stylistic category that I would call "utilitarian." He does not weave pieces that conform to a regional design (such as Two Grey Hills, Ganado, or Crystal). Roy considers himself similar to other contemporary weavers such as TahNibaa Naataanii, D.Y. Begay, Morris Muskett and Gilbert Begay whom also create utilitarian weavings such as rug dresses, sashes, shoulder blankets, bags, ceremonial socks, et cetera. For Roy and other weavers who depart from regional styles, weaving utilitarian items redefines the terms by which they objectify their art practice. This is informed by the belief that "modern" Navajo weaving (and by extension Navajo art forms in general) has been influenced and conceptualized largely from an external Non-Native perspective. With these ideas in mind we concluded our first meeting and I returned to Window Rock to begin the first draft of our exhibition proposal.

During subsequent phone conversations and planning meetings over the following months, we clarified our exhibit themes in several revisions of the exhibition proposal I wrote based on our collective ideas. Each draft was sent to Roy for his approval and amended with his suggestions and ideas. While not all of Roy's ideas were able to be realized in the final exhibition due to space and economic considerations, we focused most of our efforts on one main point: to present the holistic technical and spiritual process of Navajo weaving from the perspective of one male Navajo weaver. This decision was made in part as a reaction to exhibitions of Navajo weaving that focused extensively on regional rug style designs or idealized a homogenous and static portrayal

of Navajo culture.⁹ Our project was meant to be a solo exhibition of one artist, including his inspiration from larger themes in Navajo philosophy—namely, the role of creation stories in weaving practice, cultural revitalization via Churro sheep raising and herding, traditional and modern re-definitions of gender roles, and utilitarian-specific weaving. This exhibit presented the process of weaving from the artist’s perspective through the display of his weavings and tools alongside personal anecdotes, photographs, plants, and fresh wool in a multi-sensory gallery experience. This exhibition differed from the previous two Roy participated in because we focused on the artistic process of one weaver, Roy, as opposed to the representation of several weavers.

Conceptual decisions required a critical reflection not only of the prior Navajo exhibitions but also a serious consideration of literature that has theorized the process of representation in museum institutions, especially, from a post-colonial perspective. In order to specifically address the main problems of representation that I identified in Chapter 3 on Navajo weaving exhibits, we made particular design decisions as a response to these common problems. The main problems I found in the literature are: (1) the problem of authority, (2) the problem of the object and meaning-making, (3) the problem of temporality, and (4) the problem of authenticity.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and Moira Simpson (1996) question the expression of authority in the museum venue; who holds authority and how this authority is manifested in cultural representations. Hooper-Greenhill specifically posits knowledge production and interpretation in the museum is highly dependent on context—both of how

⁹ Regional rug style designs were promoted by traders such as, Juan Lorenzo Hubbell at Ganado Trading Post, Fred Harvey of Harvey Company, and J.B. Moore at Crystal Trading Post (Brody 1979:63-65). Refer also to Chapter 3 for discussion on Navajo weaving representation in the literature.

an object is displayed physically and how it is described within social and intellectual frameworks (2000:15). Meanwhile, Simpson presents examples of how tribal community museums asserted authority in their cultural reproduction within broader political economies in a postcolonial situation (1996:135). Following a standard that problematizes the traditional colonial imperatives of authority in museums and the subsequent cause to subvert these power structures, I urged Roy to make many of decisions in object selection and interpretation; components that I felt demanded the most artist input. However, because I held the decision-making power in regards to gallery layout and negotiation with department faculty in object treatment Roy did not have as much authority in this regard. An example of our shared authority was in the development of exhibition themes.

While I established with Roy the perimeters of what could realistically be exhibited (based on the dimensions of the gallery space, security considerations, etc.), we imagined the main exhibition themes together and later Roy decided what objects he wanted to display in the exhibit that fit with these themes. For example, due to his personal interest in woven horse implements and a desire to carry on the legacy of his grandfather Roy chose to exhibit a selection of horse bridles, saddle cinches, lead ropes, saddle blankets, and a saddle pad. While the loan process to secure some of these objects was a greater challenge than we originally anticipated—because of high value of the objects and associated shipping and insurance costs—the inclusion of these objects was well received by the audience (see Challenges We Encountered section of the chapter for a more detailed discussion). I had not seen Navajo horse implements displayed in any of

the other museum exhibitions I that reviewed so the inclusion of these objects most likely introduced a new style of weaving for many of the visitors.

In addition to the authority Roy exercised in the object selection process, Roy also provided most of the object interpretation as well. While I wrote the two introductory text panels (described below), Roy recited a portion of Spider Man's legacy from our creation stories in one large text panel and provided brief quotes about his favorite objects in the accompanying text labels (sent to me via electronic correspondence). Likewise, Roy decided upon the Navajo exhibit title to highlight the often-overlooked figure in our creation stories, Spider Man. We agreed that creating a title in Navajo would be most appropriate in order to heighten the Navajo-centric orientation of the exhibition:

Ná'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady. I helped create the secondary title that provided a cultural context for Roy's primary title. The inclusion of Roy's voice on object labels throughout the gallery helped create a sense of "journey" with the artist, by the artist.

This sentiment is stated overtly in the introductory text panel as the main intention of the exhibition. I briefly illuminate the contentious history that anthropologists have held with Navajo people regarding the study and collection of our material culture and traditions. Furthermore, I broadly establish the importance of incorporating Native perspectives and traditions into museum practice. While not explicitly stated, my personal motivation for framing the exhibition in these terms is due to the fact that knowledge production within the discipline of anthropology and the museum has most often privileged non-Native scholarship and has contributed towards the construction of

alternate Native subjectivities external to the community of origin. By situating object interpretation from Roy's perspective, the exhibit actively confronts the museological challenge of representing the "other." As James Clifford describes ethnographic authority,

... while ethnographic writing cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, a-historical 'others' [Clifford 1983:119]

Clifford acknowledges the complex sociopolitical power dynamics that dictate social relationships (especially in the anthropological discipline). He critiques the "colonial modes of representation" and the inherent challenges of authority in ethnography. While I cannot wholly escape this problem of "othering," as I have also placed Roy and I into this so-called essentialist category through the analysis of our exhibition, we can at least exercise agency in the construction of our cultural representations.

Moreover, our exhibition resituates the Navajo curators as protagonists in anthropological (and museological) theorization rather than mere subjects to the discipline. Therefore, my main contribution to the exhibition display was the critical framing of our exhibit ideas, which I believe was a necessary and educational imperative for our audience. Below is the introductory panel that I wrote,

Yá'át'ééh! (Sounds like yah-ah-t-ay) This is our greeting in the Navajo language. More appropriately we prefer to call ourselves, Diné, which means "the people." Diné culture and weaving has been a popular topic of study for several decades. Such interest has led to numerous publications and exhibitions, often without the consent or direct involvement of our people. For this reason some of us have grown hesitant to share aspects of our culture that have been exploited in the past. However, Native people and museums that hold our cultural objects have recently taken a more active role in integrating our traditions and perspectives into exhibitions. Following this precedent, the intention of this exhibit is to depict the

holistic process of Diné weaving *from* a Diné weaver’s perspective. Furthermore, while the performance of weaving follows a long spiritual tradition in our culture, the creativity and vision behind each piece is a unique interpretation by one individual.

In addition, Roy’s introduction emphasizes his unique identity as a Navajo weaver—another important consideration we had for the exhibition. I also wrote our second panel (based on our mutually determined exhibition themes),

Roy Kady, a fourth generation master weaver, has been practicing the weaving tradition since he constructed his first loom with his mother at age nine. As you move through the exhibit space you will experience Roy’s expressive journey through three unified sections: plant, weaver, and animal. The woven products on the wall are just one aspect of weaving within this larger process. As in Diné philosophy, beauty is expressed and observed in every step along the way. Come touch, smell, see, and listen as Roy shares his personal inspirations and insights as a Diné weaver.

To confront the problem of temporality within the museum space we sought to display items that situated Roy in a modern timeframe. More specifically, this problem refers to what Anne McClintock (1995) calls “panoptic time,” a standpoint of western privilege where time (and consequently, progress) is halted for the culture on display.¹⁰ In other displays of Navajo weaving, I noted that some exhibitions only included historic photographs of Navajo weavers (almost always female). This is problematic for a number of reasons: (1) Navajo weaving is presented as an art form that must maintain a sense of “tradition” via historic presentation and interpretation; (2) Navajo people are depicted as a culture from the past, perhaps no longer existent, and not as a modern, living community; and (3) the past is presented as an ideal, or romanticized, state of Navajo culture before being tarnished by Western contact. For this reason, we felt it was very

¹⁰ See explanation in Chapter 2 on “Problem of Temporality.”

important to show Roy as a living artist and also dispel the notion of a homogenous Navajo weaving narrative, such as those classic black and white trade photographs of Navajo mother and child seated in front of the loom, Monument Valley looming in the distance. Roy's role as a male weaver, chapter house president, sheepherder, and educator, challenge these stereotypical identifications. Therefore, we decided to incorporate photographs of Roy and his family, his home in Teec Nos Pos, Arizona, and his sheep. A film titled, *A Gift From Talking God: The Story of the Navajo Churro*, produced and directed by Peter Blystone (2008), was also screened in the gallery so that visitors could see and hear Roy explain his experience raising Churro sheep, a vital practice for him because he primarily uses Churro wool for spinning, dying, and weaving. The exhibition space was filled with a sense of Roy's existence, not as a passive voice, but rather an active and engaging personality.

Related to the problem of temporality is the problem of authenticity in the museum venue that I outlined in Chapter 2. Displays of Native culture, such as the typical Navajo female weaver image described above, create and perpetuate a standard narrative of Native-ness to which all other representations are compared. Likewise, the homogenization of Navajo culture was precipitated by the aesthetic preferences of Anglo traders at the turn of the 20th century. Eventually, Navajo weaving designs and the gender roles associated with the task have become standardized and legitimized accordingly. The vast majority of the literature published on Navajo weaving recites these common themes. Navajo weavers that operate outside the confines of these definitions often find their "authenticity" as an artist challenged by the art market or even other weavers. Such

classifications deny individual Navajo agency to change or integrate new methods, themes, and ideas without question. Because Roy is well known as a leader and educator of traditional fiber arts in his community, he has not faced these challenges from tribal members. However, outside his community stereotypes about Navajo weavers persist; presenting him as an individual artist in the exhibition was more important for non-Navajo visitors to understand. Therefore, all exhibit text panels, with the exception of Roy's recitation of Spiderman's legacy, focused on Roy's personal interpretation of weaving rather than a generalized narrative of Navajo weaving.

Finally, on the problem of the object and meaning-making covered in Chapter 2, museum curators have the great responsibility to interpret and assign meaning to objects—but often from the perspective of their own cultural background, value system, and academic discipline. In our exhibition, Roy's personal interpretation was crucial to challenging the “outsider” representation and reorienting the meaning of his objects in their appropriate contexts. We wanted visitors to experience the meaning of Roy's objects and inspiration in a way that mirrors his own perception of weaving—through the senses. Therefore, we created “touch and feel” stations of plants used for dying, baskets of fresh wool, looms in progress with several roving of newly carded wool, etc (See Appendix H for object list). Although I established approximately where each object and weaving should be placed, Roy was the one responsible for most of the object arrangement that corresponded with a particular personal or cultural meaning within the exhibition space. For instance, the placement of the weaving dedication case in the center of the gallery was an idea conceived by Roy as he related it to the fire at the center of a

hogan, a symbolic position to honor one's ancestors. Likewise, he wanted the dedication to his ancestors and the family members who taught him to weave to be located in the center of the gallery as homage to traditional Navajo philosophical structure.

Lastly, to achieve our conceptual goals in the physical layout of the exhibition, I proposed we focus on three distinct aspects of the weaving process: plant, animal, and weaver. The purpose of this layout was to bring the visitor through the actions that Roy traditionally recited in his creative weaving progression. The exhibit did not merely focus on the technical aspects of weaving but rather the integration of Roy's personal feelings and thoughts about each object, as a way to personalize the often *impersonal* representation of Navajo weavings. As stated before, we envisioned our exhibit to contain many plant and animal elements in order to appeal to the visitor's senses. Acknowledging the geographic distance between where the exhibit was displayed at the University of Denver and Roy's home in Teec Nos Pos, Arizona we decided to bring a part of the living *Diné Bikéyah* into the exhibit space. We sought to utilize the visitor's sensory cognition, rather than a purely intellectual form of understanding.

Expanding our Collaboration

While the collaborative process with Roy was certainly a central component in the creation of our exhibition, other collaborative partnerships were developed in tandem as well.

Joe Kee (Navajo), a professor of Navajo Language at the University of New Mexico, Gallup, was contacted by Roy to help in the proper translation of the exhibit

title. It was very important that all cultural aspects of the exhibit (language, stories, names, etc.) be represented as accurately as possible and to incorporate the perspective of other Navajo individuals.

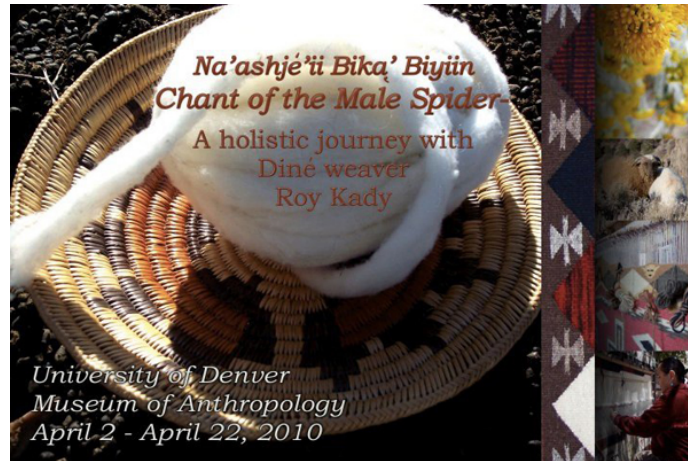


Image 9 – Poster and invitation design by Leo Begay. File provided by author 2010.

Leo Begay (Navajo), an undergraduate student in the Native Student Alliance (NSA) group at the University of Denver, helped design the invitation postcard and text panels. His understanding of Navajo design was apparent in the postcard layout that featured four small images (to represent plant, animal, weaver, and weaving respectively) next to the main image of a Navajo ceremonial basket with sheep manure in the background. Furthermore, the number four carries cultural significance in Navajo philosophy and aesthetics. It references the four sacred mountains, four sacred stones, and the four worlds of emergence in Navajo creation stories. Although the unique Navajo aesthetic of these design elements would not be perceived by the majority of the public attending our exhibit, it was a design consideration that was nevertheless very important to Roy and I.

Theresa Halsey, CU Boulder Oyate Community Advisor and Radio Host of KGNU's *Native Voices*, provided assistance in the advertising of the exhibit. She invited me to speak on her radio show during a 20-minute interview segment to promote the opening reception and Roy's work. In addition, she publishes a monthly Native community newsletter, also titled *Native Voices*, where she promoted the exhibit via email. I credit her advertising, in conjunction with the marketing I conducted through the Denver Indian Center, for helping draw a large crowd to our opening reception.



*Image 10 – Freddie Bitsoie and Teresa Montoya discuss the opening reception.
Photo provided by author 2010.*

Freddie Bitsoie (Navajo), professional chef and Roy's friend, was invited by Roy to cater the opening reception event. Not only is Mr. Bitsoie a chef but also a student of anthropology. His passion for the culinary arts was based on his interest in "Native cuisine" and a desire to correct the commonly held misconception that fry bread is the only culinary contribution to so-called "Native American cuisine." On his website, he explains that "food culture between tribes from all of the Americas are vastly different" therefore his aim as a Native chef is to "deconstruct current concepts of 'Native American food' and definitions, so that all Native tribes in the Americas will gain much

respect for their culturally specific foods and dishes they gave to the world without placement into one generic category” (Bitsoie 2009). Therefore, his culinary philosophy includes the creation of traditional foods utilizing ingredients indigenous to the region in which he is working (or in the case of our Denver exhibit, the region where Roy resides).

For the exhibit, he created a menu using herbs and plants gathered by Roy from Teec Nos Pos, Arizona (see Appendix I for menu). In addition, Roy volunteered to slaughter one of the lambs from his flock as a symbolic gift for the opening reception. The integration of Navajo cuisine no doubt added to the sensory experience in the exhibition.

Through my position as American Indian Research Services Coordinator at the Center for Multicultural Excellence I saw the exhibition as a wonderful opportunity to increase Native student engagement on campus and with the greater Denver metro Native community at large. The exhibition became increasingly focused on fostering a sense of community not only through our various collaborations, but also with the visitors that Roy sought to “enlighten” (as Roy self-described his approach to education). His inclination towards teaching became apparent to me during the week leading up to our exhibition opening. Roy arrived to Denver four days before the opening date to prepare and install exhibit objects. Throughout the week, several students and faculty from the department, eager to meet the featured weaver of the exhibition, visited the gallery in between classes to observe the progress of our installation. Roy demonstrated wool carding and spinning, dye creation, wool rope weaving, and answered questions of the curious passerby. I learned how to card and spin wool one afternoon in the gallery as we

took a break. I felt humbled by this process as Roy instructed me how to properly work the wool—a practice that will require much more time to learn. Participating in this exhibit process with Roy has inspired me to learn weaving.

Opening Night

*This is it
My tiny office serves as a dressing room
I exhale as she wraps the deer skin around my calves
I'm wearing the boots my aunt made, just for this occasion
And the rug-style dress my mom sewed with such care
Tonight is our exhibition opening
And among the chaos and the excitement
There is but one center of calm
Roy Kady, our featured weaver
With such passion he speaks,
fervent in his educational cause
Bringing weaving back to our people
His teaching has no bounds
And so now with few minutes remaining
the culminating moment
After our countless hours of work
Together we made it happen
To share and enlighten
Far from Diné Bikéyah
All the way to Denver
We brought a piece of home here
As sage and cliffrose filled the room
The smoke of his pipe wafts in the air
The crowd awaiting the freshly prepared mutton
The energy was almost palpable
Like the way he described the aching
Yearning to weave after a long hiatus
It was all connected
We hoped they would understand
This was all part of the process
Not to elucidate an elusive spiritual meaning
Or a regional rug style
No, it was simply to share this journey*



*Image 11 – Roy Kady, Teresa Montoya and Freddie Bitsoie on opening night.
Photo provided by author 2010.*

One of the most profound experiences for me during the opening night reception was the gallery blessing that occurred right before the doors were opened to the public. I felt anxious as we hurriedly put the finishing touches in the gallery, making sure text cards were straight, objects were secure, food was in place, and media was ready for the lecture. But all nervousness surprisingly dissipated as the blessing ceremony began. Exhibit cases had been moved aside to make room for the sheepskin pelt laid in the center of the floor where Roy would carry out the ceremony. It was a private event; only our families and the faculty and students who helped install the exhibition were allowed in the sacred space—in the sense that the blessing would unify the objects and participants in that place and for one purpose. We formed a sitting circle on the floor as Roy began chanting. As I glanced around the room I felt an enormous sense of elation. I was especially thankful that my grandparents had made the ten-hour journey from the Navajo reservation to attend this event. I could read the pride on their faces of our accomplishment for we had brought a small piece of *Diné Bikéyah* to the University of Denver.

Slowly, I inhaled the sheep tobacco through the pipe after Roy finished his prayer. Our collective breathing filled the room with pungent sweetness as we each took turns cleansing ourselves with the pipe smoke. Next, we each drank from the gourd filled with water and tobacco residue. As the ceremony concluded we poured out the remaining water and placed the gourd alongside the tobacco pipe back in the sheep dedication case, an appropriate example of “indigenous curation.”¹¹

It was important that the objects be treated with care and respect, not necessarily to preserve them for perpetuity, but rather for their spiritual importance and continued use in ceremonies. For example, Roy still currently uses all the objects that were displayed in our sheep and ancestors dedication cases: the tobacco pipe, ceremonial gourd, and corn cob lighter. In addition, the weavings that Roy and his family lent for the exhibition also continue to serve a practical purpose. Other examples include the rug dress that Roy wove for his niece’s wedding ceremony and the horse implements created for equestrian purposes.

Most visitors did not notice the corn pollen that coated many of the objects and weavings in the gallery after the ceremony. However, a few keen Navajo observers understood the purpose of the so-called dust that was intentionally left on the objects as a blessing. Roy and I decided not to explain the meaning of ceremonial objects or the significance assigned to the placement of certain items in the object label cards. We recognized that Navajo visitors may have been more likely to understand their meaning

¹¹ The concept of “indigenous curation,” a term coined by Christina Kreps (2003) in her book, *Liberating Culture: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*, is a useful way to consider “traditional” methods of caring for objects alongside so-called Western methods of collections stewardship. Kreps challenges the assumption that non-Western societies do not have practices in place to properly care for and store items of value, rather, she claims that these communities simply have different ways of approaching object care that are no less valid than Western practices. In her book Kreps cites examples from Indonesia, the Pacific, Africa, and Native North America.

but it was a meaning not meant to be shared with those who would not understand it without prior knowledge of Diné culture.

By the time we emerged from the smoke filled gallery, a crowd of over 150 had gathered in the small hallway. Despite a tardy start, the enthusiasm I gauged in the audience based on higher attendance than anticipated, demonstrated significant public interest in Navajo culture and weaving. The efficacy of the messages we sought to promote was measured with surveys distributed on opening night. The results of these surveys are discussed in the following section.

Audience Surveys

My purpose in distributing surveys was to gain a sense of how well the public understood the exhibition information. I compared Native and non-Native responses in order to understand whether nuanced expressions of “Navajo-ness” were grasped by the Native audience. I explored how exhibition interpretation conveyed various levels of knowledge for different types of audiences (in this case, Native and non-Native community members). Questions were asked about how they felt the Navajo culture was represented in the exhibition, to see if respondents noticed the collaborative aspects in design and text panels. Furthermore, in order to measure the effectiveness of the exhibit’s ability to incite interest in Navajo weaving and culture, the survey also asked respondents to describe how and if they would learn more on their own after viewing the exhibition. Due to Roy’s personal interest in cultural education, this survey was also meant to elicit an understanding of the exhibit’s efficacy in creating a didactic visitor experience.

Approximately one third of the audience in attendance completed the survey form (47 individuals). Eleven respondents self-identified as being Native American and 36 respondents self-identified as being non-Native. A majority of the Native American respondents were Navajo, 8 individuals, and cited that they had knowledge about Navajo weaving prior to viewing the exhibition. Many of the Navajo respondents mentioned either a personal experience of weaving or learning about the process and meaning through a family member who weaves. One Navajo respondent said, "I grew up on Navajo reservation and saw grandma weaving" while another said, "I grew up with my grandmother teaching me about weaving." Likewise, another Navajo respondent replied, "As a Navajo, I've had some exposure to weaving, though I haven't had many hours behind a loom." One respondent suggested a deeper understanding of cultural knowledge, "I practice pretty much the traditional ways." A few others cited knowledge gained from research or general knowledge about "sand painting designs, symbolism, and techniques."

When asked about how the exhibit added to one's knowledge of Navajo culture and/or weaving two Navajo respondents mentioned that they "never knew the male side of the stories" and "never knew the Spider Man story!" Other respondents revealed a more emotional response to the exhibit, "I am enriched by their personal stories and I like to hear about my cultural stories" and "It renewed pleasant, loving memories" and "inspiring". Overall, all Native respondents provided affirmative responses that the exhibit added to their prior knowledge of Navajo weaving and culture.

In response to the manner of representation of Navajo culture in the exhibit, one Navajo respondent said, “I really liked the station where you could touch and smell the plants and herbs. I love the smell of cedar!” I later learned from a colleague present at the opening exhibition event how they witnessed a Navajo woman, upon entering the gallery, begin to cry because of the “overwhelming scent of sage and cedar.” Apparently, she had not been home to the “rez” (as many Native people refer to the reservation) for a prolonged period of time and the scent of familiar plants from home elicited a nostalgic emotional response. Although our intention was not to make visitors cry in our exhibition, the affective experience of touching and smelling elements on display was encouraged. We hoped to effectively motivate visitors in order to continue and expand their interest in Navajo weaving and culture. Our aim to recreate a sensory experience in the gallery space was clearly achieved in the case of this particular Navajo visitor as she was apparently reminded of the visceral sensation of “home.”

Other Native respondents similarly liked the sensory component in the exhibition saying, “The sensory experience greatly added to the ‘immersion’ experience.” Overall, many of the Native respondents noted a connection between the living elements in the exhibit space and its connection with Navajo culture, as presented through Roy’s perspective as a weaver. One respondent even referenced the importance of our Navajo-curated exhibition and perhaps understood cultural revitalization as an imperative that Roy promotes through Churro husbandry and weaving: “I am thrilled that as a reclamation project of sorts that it was created by Navajo hands!” Such statements also seem to reflect a sentiment of “Native pride.”

Another question asked whether the respondent would want to learn more about Navajo culture and how they plan to achieve this task. One said, “I am Navajo and know a lot, but its great to see a Navajo weaver acknowledged and showcased. Beautiful!” Similarly, another responded, “I am always interested in my Native culture and I’m fortunate my mother has passed on her knowledge to me.” Another added, “I want to continue to learn more about my culture and be more involved.” Here, the Native respondents all referenced a personal connection to their culture through communal or familial relations. Thus, their understanding of the exhibit material obviously spoke to them on a much more personal level. A few others described a general desire to learn more by visiting “Navajo land” and attending lectures more often. One respondent expressed an interest in attending the Sheep is Life Conference, a gathering sponsored by non-profit organization, Diné be’ Iiná, of which Roy was the former president. Roy and I are currently curating a second exhibition to be shown at the 2011 conference.

Out of the 35 non-Native respondents on opening night, 15 described having no prior knowledge about Navajo weaving and/or culture prior to viewing the exhibition. In response to how the exhibit expanded their knowledge of Navajo culture and/or weaving many commented on the stories and the meaning behind the weavings as a new understanding. One respondent noted, “Hearing Roy’s explanation of the Two Spirits increased my understanding of the nature of gender roles in Dine culture.”¹² Indeed, there exists many misconceptions about gender roles and homosexuality within tribal

¹² At the third annual Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference (held in Winnepeg, Manitoba, Canada) in 1990, the term *two-spirit* was designated to replace the use of *berdache* to refer to Native peoples who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc. *Two-spirit* is derived from a translation of an ojibwe term, *niizh manidoowag*, of the same meaning (O’Brien 2009:64).

communities; the Navajo Nation is no exception. One of our intended efforts of this exhibition was to challenge these perspectives and promote the idea that Navajo men can and are weaving. Furthermore, their decision to weave may or may not be associated with their sexual orientation. There is not necessarily a causal link. With increased public knowledge of their weaving ambitions independent of notions of gender roles, greater appreciation of the creativity of men simply as weavers can be shared.

Additionally, many non-Native visitors were surprised to learn the spiritual significance of Navajo weavings and related the sensory experience in the exhibit to this newfound understanding. One student recalled, “I learned about meaning—spiritual life of weavings. I loved smelling and touching the materials used for dyes—as well as the raw wool.” In a similar recollection another student noted, “I learned that there is so much more involved with Navajo than purposeless design, that patterns and weaving styles all have stories to tell.”



Image 12 –View of “touch and smell” elements in the gallery. Photo taken by author 2010.

When asked about the manner of cultural representation in the exhibition it was surprisingly reassuring to hear respondents appreciate the uniqueness of Roy’s self-

representation. One student responded, “I loved that it was represented by one of the community members—perfect.” Many more visitors understood our emphasis on the personal journey of one Navajo artist rather than a general representation of the entire Navajo culture that I anticipated. “I loved having heard Roy Kady’s lecture. It helped me understand a lot more about the place that weaving holds.” Additionally, our desire to present the spiritual and cultural underpinnings over technical process was clearly elucidated to one visitor who stated, “I like that there was more talk of culture and belief than on practical details of weaving.”

However, not all visitors responded positively to our artist-centric focus, “I would like more about the Navajo culture and less about the personal journey” and “It was well-thought out by beginning with tools and progressing to the loom with the tools in use. The connection of the spindle to roving was not self-evident as to how the yarn was made.” A few members from a weaving guild located in Colorado Springs also recited similar feelings to me in a conversation during the opening. As weavers they were very interested in seeing the process of dyeing, spinning, and weaving explained in a step-by-step layout—which our exhibition did not explicitly emphasize. While I acknowledge this critique is not unfounded, our intention in this exhibition was not to reproduce processes that we felt have been covered in the literature and other museum exhibitions on Navajo weaving. As with any exhibition, the presentation style and themes cannot cater to every visitor’s expectations; however, critiques raised by members of the weaving guild demonstrate the diversity of audience expectations and levels of knowledge about the exhibition material. Bearing in mind this range of visitor reaction, I will make a greater

effort in our next exhibit to include a broader scope of information about weaving for the audience that may or may not have knowledge of Navajo weaving.

Several non-Native respondents' statements that referenced values such as respect, genuineness, and integrity impressed me. For instance, one student wrote, "It felt very genuine, and very welcoming. The integrity of the items displayed was clearly maintained." In this statement I assume "integrity" is referring to the appropriate cultural meaning of the objects. In that sense, these visitors perceived a crucial facet of our collaborative design to display and interpret Navajo culture in a culturally appropriate manner according to the precepts established by Roy and those he consults for spiritual guidance. Similarly, other respondents expressed similar sentiments saying, "The culture was presented very respectfully" and "It was very thoughtful and respectful!"

Finally, most non-Native respondents expressed an interest in learning more about Navajo culture in the following self-selected ways: two want to visit Navajo Nation, three would do online research, four would attend other exhibits/museums/lectures on the topic, two would talk to Navajo people to learn more, and two expressed an increased interest in history and oral history.

Out of the 35 non-Native respondents that completed the survey form on opening night, 13 respondents described themselves as having some knowledge of weaving and Navajo culture prior to seeing the exhibition. Their responses tended to suggest a deeper level of understanding than their non-Native counterparts who reported not having any prior knowledge of Navajo culture. One respondent said, "This exhibit added greatly to my knowledge by giving the invaluable perspective of the master weaver himself."

Furthermore, a faculty member from another university noted, “The lecture was an extraordinarily unique aspect that added a personal touch to this work. I believe the audience was assured that were experiencing something special as a result.” In both responses, the visitors referenced the knowledge transmitted by Roy in his lecture. The personal interpretation of Roy’s life, weaving, and sheep rearing shared in his stories clearly impressed many of the audience members as expressed through these statements. Other visitors noted the significant relation between sheep and spirituality in traditional Navajo culture, a livelihood that is very important for Roy in his work with *Diné be' iiná*.

On the manner of representation, several non-Native respondents noted the relationship of the curators relative to the exhibit and each other. One student observed, “It was the most collaborative exhibit on Navajo weaving that I have ever seen or heard of.” Another respondent noted, “This was an excellent manner to show Navajo culture. By Natives, for Natives but also non-Natives were invited to learn.” Both responses elicit these visitors’ acknowledgement of the Native curated exhibit as a deviation from other exhibition presentations. One student noted how the exhibit “broke down the traditional barrier between curator, subject, object, and visitor.” Clearly, this visitor had some prior understanding of the complex power dynamics either within the exhibitionary complex or in broader structures of Native representation. Finally, a faculty member from another university commented on a point that I especially wanted to elucidate: the diversity of Navajo culture. “I think the co-curators represented one small aspect of a diverse culture, though they represented it well. Very unique manner of presentation; extremely personal.” Overall all respondents particularly enjoyed the lecture, the sensory

components of the exhibit, and the Navajo cuisine prepared by Diné chef, Freddie Bitsoie. In this way, a holistic presentation yielded a holistic experience for attendees on opening night.

While the results of the survey bore overwhelmingly positive feedback it is worthwhile to note once again that only one third of the visitors attending actually completed the form. This may indicate that those that were most excited or supportive of the exhibition took the time to fill out the form and thus produced the positive results I have described. One might expect to have received more varied responses in the surveys; therefore, I question my ability to create thought-provoking questions and similarly, the ability for the average museum visitor to be able to critically engage topics I addressed in the survey given limited time and space in which to complete the form. Results may have yielded more critical answers had I conducted individual interviews with a random sample of visitors after the opening night or had I offered some sort of incentive for more visitors to fill out the form in order to increase my sample size. Certainly, these issues will be taken into consideration during the next iteration of our exhibit installation. A comparative analysis of both sets of surveys will produce an interesting study of audience reactions amongst different demographics and geographic locations.

Challenges We Encountered

Miriam Kahn (2000) provides a very detailed account of the challenges of collaborative exhibition making in her article, *Not Really Pacific Voices: Politics of Representation in Collaborative Museum Exhibits*. Kahn describes the process of

curating the Burke Museum exhibit, *Pacific Voices*, which opened in late 1997. She details the “layers of complexity” exhibit team members faced as they negotiated multiple “roles of interpretation” and desired outcomes from various stakeholders (Kahn 2000:62). Like Kahn’s reflective analysis of the collaborative process, I attempted to think critically about my own co-curatorial experience with Roy in our exhibition. Not only does this reflection serve to address problems as we plan to develop our next collaborative exhibit project but also speaks to the broader issues of museum collaboration still relevant today. I initiated our discussion of exhibition challenges by describing my perspective of the collaborative process:

Teresa Montoya: To begin, I don’t like how other exhibits didn’t include the artists’ perspective as much as they could have and not doing things the way they would want to be represented—so for me, I decided ‘I want Roy to make all the major decisions’ and so the hardest thing was deciding where do we meet? There were certain times I should have been more specific about what my parameters were, given by my department and so that is where it got weird with deadlines. So now going into the next exhibit, what should the role be when certain things have to be met and how to fulfill what you want and to give you the space and the ability to choose what you want to depict. That for me was the biggest challenge—balancing authority.

Roy Kady: I also think that. I felt the same thing. But it was not really anybody’s fault in a way. It was just a matter of communication, on my part too. I know a lot of times, I don’t know if it’s good or bad, sometimes I have this way of approaching things ‘if it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t then, it wasn’t meant to be.’ But I know I just can’t say that to everything that I approach. I like the fact that in your own way, your profession, there should be a timeline and it’s something that I have to get reacquainted with. But when it comes down to working with my sheep I didn’t really use that structure. When it comes to the natural law and order of things, that didn’t work. And I’ve gotten used to that time frame and even when I started volunteering for Diné be’ iina, it was getting used to that again [referring to planning] ... and now even more so with my position as president. So what I’m saying is, the way you did things is important to me. Now I know, to see it in that perspective is good. You

know you have a goal and so that is something I want to see for this [upcoming] exhibit.

What this conversation reveals is a fundamental difference in our approaches to planning; my attempt to plan according to a museum schedule, his attempt to conform to a schedule around his chapterhouse duties and sheep herding. However, our unwavering dedication to the cause of education achieved through the exhibition was perhaps the most cohesive element that actually allowed the project to come to fruition. Our difficulties communicating were most certainly exacerbated by distance and differing perceptions of time commitments. While I planned four trips to the reservation to meet with Roy only two meetings actually occurred. These two meetings were very productive, however, and the foundation of our exhibition themes, design, and media all were decided upon over the duration of just 6 hours (in the two meetings combined). The rest of the exhibition details were planned through email correspondence as we experienced great difficulty coordinating our schedules for telephone conferences. Furthermore, Roy's position as Teec Nos Pos Chapter president meant that he had very little time to spend planning an exhibition 800 miles away in Denver, Colorado. I recognized this inherent challenge as we decided to work together but did not anticipate the level of difficulty these challenges would pose for our project. I soon learned that many of our challenges were not so much personal conflicts but rather broader social differences between the two worlds we found ourselves attempting to merge.

Addressing unforeseen emergencies within Roy's community such as snowstorms and road closures obviously took precedence in terms of his available time and resources. Small tribal communities, such as Teec Nos Pos, face problems such as scarcity of water

resources, employment opportunities, and good education. The 2000 United States census reported a per capita income of just \$6,229 among the 799 residents, 43.8% of which live below the poverty line. Thus, there is a great necessity for economic development and improved infrastructure. Youth community involvement and perpetuation of cultural knowledge and language is also a paramount concern in this community. Therefore, despite the frustration that I felt at times trying to establish firm deadlines in our exhibition planning, I also understood that taking care of his community was and should have been his main concern. Thus, I tried to the best of my ability to be flexible and understanding of our open-ended schedule.

There were a few occasions that our miscommunications caused problems with my department and the collectors who were loaning weavings for the exhibition. Initially, Roy and I decided that most of the weavings on display would be his own pieces that he owned. However, there were a few pieces that he had sold to collectors, with whom he had a good relationship, which he wanted to borrow. My interpretation of a few meant three or less pieces, Roy's interpretation meant eight objects. Because of my commitment to what I believed to be a true collaboration, I did not object to Roy's wishes. Yet due in part to my unwillingness to initially be assertive with deadlines, object quantity and size, and so forth the collections manger and I soon started receiving weavings in the mail that we had not originally anticipated. As Roy's ambitions grew, so did the complications of assuring that the pieces could be properly displayed and safeguarded. While I was very excited about the prospect of including many more beautiful weavings in our exhibition, our original intention of allowing visitors to touch all objects fell to the wayside. A

plethora of new issues was introduced with the inclusion of the borrowed weavings including: security considerations in an unguarded gallery space, negotiating insurance of objects per university and departmental guidelines, promptly securing loan forms, and increased shipping costs of multiple weavings (along with shipping insurance). Despite the complications of renegotiating the inclusion of more weavings, amendments were made to our original exhibition plan such as creating less text panels and not including a wool-spinning activity area to allow more space for the additional weavings.

Another challenge we faced was fundraising. The standard allotted budget for graduate museum exhibits in the Anthropology department is usually limited to \$300 to help cover the costs of catering for the opening reception and possibly a few extra materials the student requires for object mounting or exhibit installation. However, because I desired to borrow objects from outside the University of Denver Museum of Anthropology (DUMA), pay for Roy's travel expenses and honorarium, and provide Navajo food at the reception, \$300 was not nearly enough to cover these additional expenditures. Through my position at the Center for Multicultural Excellence I was able to raise additional funds provided by their annual budget and extra funding was provided through the Native Alumni Group on campus. Moreover, an arrangement was made with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science in which a monetary donation towards our exhibition was made in exchange for a textile consultation with Roy in the museum's collection. Nevertheless, despite my efforts to raise more money, our budget had increased to over \$3,000. A large portion of our expenditures was to cover the transportation (from Scottsdale, Arizona) and food preparation fees to bring Chef Freddie

Bitsoie, a close friend of Roy's, as our reception caterer. Initially I was hesitant to hire Mr. Bitsoie due to our limited budget but Roy was adamant to hire him as our caterer so I obliged. Because we were unable to fundraise more donations in the limited amount of time we had Roy offered to use his personal honorarium to help cover Mr. Bitsoie's costs. While this was not the ideal scenario, Roy did not want to accept the honorarium as he felt the completion of this exhibition was sufficient compensation. I felt uneasy with his suggestion but also wanted to carry out the exhibition in the way that he imagined, even if that meant bringing a chef from another state to cater our opening night event. In retrospect, I'm glad my initial apprehension did not quell Roy's ambitions. The culinary ambiance provided by Mr. Bitsoie along with his progressive interpretation of traditional Navajo cuisine was one of the most popular aspects of the gallery reception.

Finally, maintaining appropriate cultural protocol was at times a challenge. For instance, traditionally our creation stories are only told during the winter months but as our exhibition dates occurred in the spring, we felt conflicted about how much information from the creation stories to include in the exhibit. While many museum exhibitions do not honor traditional cultural guidelines to this degree, we wanted to make an effort to honor Navajo mores as much as possible. This desire was based on our own personal Navajo convictions, a value that we both wanted to uphold. Once again, Christina Kreps' (2003) notion of "Indigenous curation" is a useful framework to consider how non-Western practices are brought into the museum space thereby modifying what was thought to be acceptable "museum mindedness." Though this concept our understanding of museum etiquette may be expanded to include cultural

traditions such as Navajo blessing ceremonies, origin story protocol, the placement of objects according to Navajo aesthetics and spatial philosophy, and the inclusion of plants from Roy's home community in the exhibit.

In consideration of Navajo storytelling practice, we decided to include one text panel that described Roy's inspiration from creation stories as it related to his weaving practice. We originally intended to include a section on his ceremonial perspectives, but due to this seasonal consideration (and space restraints within the gallery) we decided not to include this section. Furthermore, we originally planned to invite a medicine man from nearby Roy's community to conduct a blessing on the gallery and all the objects within. We felt it was important to include this ceremony as part of the exhibition process to not only properly respect the weavings on display but to ensure that the entire event itself would be conducted in the "right way." Unfortunately, two weeks prior to the exhibition opening the medicine man notified us that he was no longer able to attend our event and conduct the ceremony. He cited personal conflicts for his change of plans. In spite of this, Roy offered to conduct a blessing ceremony himself and the honorarium that was originally intended for the medicine man was redirected towards Mr. Bitsoie's costs. This initial setback actually revealed itself to be helpful towards our fundraising efforts.



Image 13 – Roy Kady, Teresa Montoya, Kellen Hinrichsen, and Brian Murphy during installation. Photo provided by author 2010.

In sum, as I explained in my conversation with Roy (cited in the transcript text) I found the authority sharing aspect of collaboration to be most challenging. I experienced difficulty asserting definitive authority in a decision when I felt all decisions should be made jointly with Roy's judgment as the primary determination. However, a complete sharing of authority on all tasks is ideal at best, unrealistic at worst. I learned that collaboration is not so much the mutual sharing of all decisions but rather the mutual understanding of assigned tasks and a mutual trust in the other individual to carry out those assignments according to pre-established goals and values. The process of collaboration in and of itself is not a panacea; rather I perceive its value to be the precedent it establishes to privilege the knowledge of the individual being represented as primary. I believe the success we achieved through our collaborative relationship was based upon our devotion to Navajo cultural education (both for Navajo people and about Navajo people). These shared values kept our vision intact as we faced common problems in collaborative exhibition development.

Moreover, the coalescence of these individual goals, my academic and personal ambitions and Roy's desire to fulfill a dream of creating a solo exhibition, set the foundation for this project and future endeavors.

A Summative Analysis in Retrospect

Driving west on Highway 64 from Shiprock, New Mexico I found myself once again filled with anticipation. It had been just over a year since I first met Roy and the seed of an idea for our collaborative exhibit was planted. Reflecting upon the events of the past year, both personal and professional, our exhibition experience stood out as a definitive milestone for me. While I tended to focus on all the aspects I would have improved in some way, I also felt proud of our accomplishment and deeply thankful for the opportunity to work with Roy, his friends and family, and the promise of yet another chance to translate our ideas into a second exhibition.

As I pulled onto the pothole filled, dirt driveway that led to the Teec Nos Pos Chapter House, I felt humbled once again by the familiar desert landscape and the uniquely Navajo elements of reservation life that surrounded me. I walked into the building where a local "spin-off" event, organized by Roy, was already underway. Several community members sat around folding tables covered with garbage bags of freshly processed wool. Roy's mother and a couple of teenagers carded wool silently as another collected the carded wool and delicately rolled the pieces into segments to later be spun into yarn and dyed. Meanwhile, Roy narrated a slideshow presentation of photos from a recent trip to Ecuador where he had convened with local weavers and participated

in a cross-cultural sharing of weaving knowledge. I glanced across the room and noticed several woven products laid across a long table in an ad hoc educational display. I smiled to myself as I recognized several pieces that had been displayed in our exhibit. There on the table they lay, without specially designed mounts or particular lighting considerations, and I felt happy to see them in the company of local weavers. I observed students and adults inspecting the various techniques of felting and weavings as they picked up the pieces and held them in their hands. This was the human connection that Roy lamented many weavings in museum collections no longer enjoy; the soft rub, a twist of yarn, the human touch we often take for granted. I suspended my “museum-mindedness” and picked up the felted saddle blanket that had been displayed in our exhibition. I was delighted to see the woven set again and imagined the infinite possibilities of its future display in our Sheep is Life exhibit, Navajo classrooms, and other venues where others could marvel at its simple beauty and tactile quality. As the event concluded, Roy and I retreated to his office to begin the interview.

I began our discussion by asking Roy to summarize his perception of collaboration in each of the three exhibitions in which he had participated: *Weaving in the Margins*, *Men Who Weave: A Revival in Diné Bikyah*, and our exhibit, *Chant of the Male Spider: A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*. In his responses, he framed his interpretation as a comparison, taking into consideration his experience in all three exhibitions. Describing his experience at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture he related,

I think the collaborative portion of that exhibit, the involvement was way less than the other two [referencing *Men Who Weave* and *Weaving in the*

Margins]. My involvement, you could say was little. But in terms of the information, interviews, and biographies—that was there. As far as really the whole perspective, the display, the panels, what’s going to be written, all that was all predetermined and my only collaborative effort was [providing] my own biography, interview, and selecting the weavings to go into the exhibit. There was also a short film but again I wasn’t really a part of it compared with the other two [referencing *Men Who Weave* and *Weaving in The Margins* again]. I remember for the opening there was a panel discussion and I was asked to be a part of the panel—that I was involved in. It was all kind of conceived in the curator’s perspective, and Joyce [museum educator] to a certain extent.

Roy described his part in our exhibition to be “more involved.” In the Navajo Nation Museum exhibition, *Men Who Weave*, Roy described his role as a co-curator who assisted the main curator, Clarenda Begay. He helped formulate questions for interviews with weavers, conduct interviews, assist filming process, and participated in the opening panel discussion.

Roy Kady: It was mostly of Clarenda’s vision, and my part in it was to talk to the weavers and to come to a consensus about the name of the exhibit, the interviews, I was involved a little bit more further than the first exhibit and also in going to the homes of the weavers in my area to help. It was really more of my involvement over all, more collaborative and more involvement than the first one.

Teresa Montoya: Do you think its partially because Clarenda is Navajo?

RK: Yeah, that’s what I was going to say.

TM: A Navajo perspective.

RK: Yes, exactly. Even if you look at the map [included in the exhibition guide], which communities we’re coming from, the spelling, in that sense was Navajo. The title for MIAC wasn’t in Navajo but the Navajo Nation and ours was in Navajo. So yeah, with the Navajo Nation, [I had] more involvement.

I was hesitant to ask Roy about the curator (Clarenda) and her Navajo identification as being a factor in their collaborative relationship because I felt my

interjection may have been a leading question. While Joyce Begay-Foss, educator for the *Weaving in the Margins* exhibition, is also Navajo, her role in object interpretation was limited since she was not the primary curator. Assuming that Roy had not analyzed the dynamics of collaboration in the same way I had, I was curious what his response would elicit. Challenging my assumption, I found that despite the difference in the language we utilized to describe collaborative dynamics, Roy's perception of comfort in a collaborative relationship was based more on the subject position of curator in relation to his community rather than an inherently "Navajo identity" of the individual. Understandably, Roy's and Clarenda's positions *within* the Navajo community (because they both continue to live on the reservation) facilitated the interview process with Navajo weavers in a way that an outsider would face greater challenges; language barriers and community social networks are two examples. I myself also felt disadvantaged at times due to my inadequate Navajo language skills however, my position as a Navajo student eager to learn compelled Roy to assume a guidance role in my "cultural learning." Roy explicitly stated the importance of Navajo language when he cited the incorporation of a Navajo title in the Navajo Nation exhibit and our exhibit. He described the inclusion of the Navajo title as an indicator of the level of involvement the participating Navajo weavers enjoyed in the development of the exhibition. Once again, his responses did not reflect his level of satisfaction regarding the representation of Navajo culture (as elucidated in Chapter 3) but rather his commentary speaks to his self-perceived level of involvement and collaboration in the three exhibition venues. Without my prompting he stated a percentage of his perception of collaboration in each exhibit:

If I was to put a percentage on my involvement the first one would be less than half, maybe 35% or 25% but then the Navajo Nation one was like almost 85% and then of course the last one was the most, for me, a shared collaborative effort from both of us. You gave me a lot of the decisions on the panels, what should be written, what should be displayed, so many things in that sense it feel like it was very true, the trueness in the sense it came from a true perspective, actually from the weaver. And how you've given me that ability and that freedom. But you also had expertise that played a lot in how the exhibit came together so that last one, I felt really good in terms of how it portrayed out the way it should be, the way it should be told, every part of it. I think that's something that made it have a real trueness.

As I told Roy when we first started the planning process, I imagined myself to be a facilitator of his ideas. This dynamic is revealed here in the description he gave of our exhibition. To the best of my ability, despite the challenges we endured in the planning process, I tried to honor the exhibition plan that Roy envisioned using the resources and skills I had acquired as a graduate student at the University of Denver—a so-called expertise that we both acknowledged. Roy described authoritative power that I gave to him but in reality I tried to minimize my own desires in favor of his wishes. Roy may have felt that I exercised authority in “giving” him control but the authority he exercised was present from the beginning, even in our decision to do an exhibition together. I asked Roy to explain further his perception of our collaboration.

Roy Kady: I think of this exhibit as a whole collaboration of my ancestors, my grandparents, my parents, my community, every person who has made a significant difference, whether it was just telling me ‘this is usually how I knot my first knot,’ they were there present in that sense. I guess if you really dissected that exhibit, strand per strand, there is a story with each one as to where it came from ... I think that's what was portrayed. And to ignite the senses, the way we did it with the food.

Teresa Montoya: Everyone really liked that. I think that was really powerful. In terms of the sensory component I think it was easy for people

to understand the touching, smelling, seeing, but to have the taste, that was what really made that point of the holistic experience...

RK: And the way that it projects is that it's ceremonial really—to include all the senses because that is how the rituals are performed. You hear, you taste, you sense, you feel—in order for you to start the healing. So it's a whole healing that took place as well and really that's the whole component that was included in the exhibit [our exhibit]. Even with the Navajo Nation exhibit, in my sense, that didn't happen. This one, yes, completely.

TM: For you, when you wanted to have Freddie [the chef] come in with the food component, was that what you were thinking, in the ceremonial sense?

RK: Yes, the five senses we wanted to include and the songs.

TM: That is really nice. I hadn't thought of it in terms of the ceremony. I mean with the blessing and everything that was really, really important. For me, I was really nervous that day and frazzled. Just having that ceremony I felt so calm afterwards. It really re-centered me ... having that ceremony just brought it back and I re-realized, 'ok, this is why I'm here. It's not about all of this other stuff that people wanted me to do,' you know? This is about sharing, the community, and then I wasn't nervous anymore. It was really special.

RK: Yes, yes good ... in that way we are talking about food. That is an important component to ceremonies. It's the food that nurtures us and makes us really feel more so good inside. It is shared with everybody else and creates this great bond. It brings us together in the ceremonial sense. Some of the more respectful manners in including the food ritual in the ceremonies are still exercised. Everybody comes to one purpose and the sharing starts to take place. That way, there's the one purpose you fulfill together. Everybody collaborates that way. I felt that was the purpose of the food was and it worked.

His perception of collaboration included family members, living and deceased, his community, and all our Navajo ancestors. Hearing his explanation shed light on several other aspects of the exhibition process for me—the ancestors and sheep dedication cases he designed and the inclusion of Navajo food prepared by his friend, Freddie Bitsoie.

Furthermore, the exhibition reception as a ceremonial experience was a notion I had not fully considered before. The culinary component in this sense was heightened because it not only fostered a communal atmosphere but also related back to our intention to create a “Navajo” experience for the visitors. For Roy, this experience was recreated through a quasi-ceremonial ritual complete with a blessing, sharing of food, and even healing as some visitors expressed nostalgic reminders of home or the restorative process for the weavings on display that were able to enjoy human interaction and blessings.

More generally, Roy also spoke about how collaboration should be conducted in any exhibition and refers to an example in his community of how he was raised with certain ideas about what the idea of collaboration means:

It’s important to include members of that community [the one being displayed], if you want to properly educate in the way that it should be perceived. I think the collaboration takes more than one person. Like in the lecture, the large weaving, I think that was the theme in a sense [collaboration]. That’s how I was brought up around here. That’s why we have our spin offs. It’s a collaboration of everybody to make it what it is. It’s not just me. That’s why I continue to tell the people ‘it’s all of you that makes this take place. We are all important components. We are all here for a purpose.’

Roy’s understanding of collaboration mirrors his position relative to the community he leads. In our conversation he constantly referred to his community, his family, and his ancestors. Thus for Roy any project that he undertakes, such as our exhibition, would bear these constituents in mind as part of his decision-making process. They become stakeholders to whom he must represent and correspondingly, uphold their integrity. Due to this principle of cultural integrity and respect, we also re-discussed our decision not to depict a “step-by step” process of weaving or ceremonial practice. Roy

commented that we showed “just enough.” Roy’s observation of knowledge stratification (by not explaining ceremonial interpretations of objects in the exhibition), is similar to an example presented about the Zuni A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center by Gwyneira Isaac (2007) in her book, *Mediating Knowledges*. Isaac explains how secrecy in the Zuni system of knowledge serves as a “pedagogical device” where the management of community knowledge “teaches an individual his or her responsibility toward knowledge acquired” (2007:33).

Likewise, I felt a personal responsibility not only to Roy but also to the Navajo community to represent Navajo “knowledge” in a respectful manner. Therefore, the method of display in our exhibition carried various levels of knowledge access and interpretation—meanings that perhaps only Navajo visitors would perceive, meanings that other Native people would understand, and meanings that a non-Native public could comprehend through the text panels, multimedia, and sensory components.



Image 14 – Sheep dedication case. Photo taken by author 2010.

Teresa Montoya: A Navajo person walking in [to the exhibit] would be able to see the placement of those objects and understand the importance of Navajo philosophy. [Such as] the sheep dedication case and having the gourd in there; I mean, we labeled everything, what they were, but we

didn't explain *how* they were used. I'm sure some Navajo people looking at the gourd would say, 'oh look, there is still tobacco leaves in there, and then the pipe...'

Roy Kady: Yes, the life element. Water, air, plants—that sort of thing is represented in that sense. They would understand that.

TM: Yeah, I was just thinking that was an interesting that we had this 'Navajo-ness' but we didn't necessarily have to explain it ... for me, I thought it was important to maintain those elements, even if they aren't explained, because maybe the non-Native or non-Navajo public doesn't necessarily need to know the ceremonial significance of having the pipe in there? But that is just me.

RK: And you're right. Also, you're right in the sense, what you just said, because in the Navajo way, and I think I explained this to you the first time too, you're not told a complete story but you learn it as you grow into your wisdom. In other words, what I know I don't know completely. There is still a whole [bunch] of learning to acquire and I'm not ever going to learn it all before I even leave this place. In the same way their teachings are administered, especially if you're going to learn about the ceremonies. There it is considered almost taboo to tell you everything that you need to know within a 24-hour period because it can overwhelm you. It can overcome you and stop your heart and so they are very cautious of that when they teach you.

TM: In terms of a medicine man's knowledge or just knowledge in general?

RK: It's usually coming from a medicine man, that knowledge, so the portrayal there maybe it played out itself ... maybe it happened that way for the consideration [of this knowledge system] ... not everything is told, especially with ceremonial stuff. I mean, we did state the weaving combs [in a label], but as to what that means, no.

TM: I was thinking about it for a while and didn't know if that [display] was a good or bad thing. In the end though, I think it is a good thing even if some people might say "oh you didn't explain this [significance] enough."

The passage above further illuminates the mentor/student relationship I described earlier. As a museum ethnographer I was able to provide a critical analysis of our

exhibition just as Roy, as a safe-keeper of Navajo knowledge, was able to enlighten me about aspects of the weaving culture of which I previously knew little. Finally, we discussed Roy's dream of his imagined exhibition that was initially the driving impetus for our collaboration.

Teresa Montoya: I remember when we first met you told that you had a recurring dream about an exhibit and I was just curious if our exhibit met that expectation?

Roy Kady: Totally ... totally. And how I know that is that the dream stopped because it was accomplished. You know, it's in its resting place now. It felt like the message from the dream as to how it needed to be told, happened. Now it's delighted, it's happy, it's harmonious. Yeah, it took place. It has been accomplished in that sense and so this next dream, not as strong, that came after, that was now about continuing it [the exhibit].

TM: Hmm. And I think you also had mentioned to me, when we first met, that you wanted to do a traveling exhibit...

RK: Yes, even within the Navajo Nation, even if it was just in the schools.

TM: So now it is kind of going in that direction, well it could go in that direction eventually [referring to our next exhibition].

With that Roy and I began a discussion of our next collaborative endeavor, a community exhibition project sponsored by *Diné be' Iná*, Inc., that will be displayed in June 2011 at the 15th Annual Sheep is Life Celebration at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. Certainly, lessons were learned in the first installment of our exhibition that will aid in the development of our next project.

In conclusion, the exhibition experience that I have illustrated in this chapter raises several new questions about the relationships museums hold with Native communities and what sort of model could be organized around these particular collaborative relationships. I have demonstrated how our deeply personal investment in

the exhibition project provided a unique and innovative interpretation of Navajo weaving. The documentation and experience of this collaborative process reveals how the emic interpretation of Navajo weaving offers an alternative mode to understanding Navajo cultural practice and authority within the museum exhibition. More broadly, such reflections point to the challenges and potentials of collaboration, as a critical methodology, mode of interpersonal relationship and an analytic category. I've suggested how this practice—both by and with Native peoples—merits further investigation, as explored throughout other chapters in this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

All histories have a history, and one is incomplete without the other... In other words, no history is complete without knowing the history of the history – Paul Chaat Smith [Smith 2009:53]

Final Thoughts

Echoing this observation by Paul Chaat Smith in his compilation of sardonic, yet heartfelt essays, *Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong* (2009), histories are often complicated, subjective, and in one way or another, biased. Likewise, a critical “unpacking” of history is an approach undertaken by postmodern scholars in the reading and interpretation of the past and how it is reproduced in the present. In this thesis I followed this analytic trajectory in the study of past Navajo weaving exhibitions and offered a critical and personal reflection of the exhibition making process with Navajo weaver Roy Kady. The collaborative process in our exhibition was centered on a mutual goal to deconstruct past representational problems we perceived in other Navajo exhibitions. While some goals were successfully met, many other new challenges were introduced in the process. The problems we confronted speak to larger issues of collaboration in museum practice today between Native community members, institutions, and broader political economies. This exhibition exercise was positioned within the discourse of postcolonial theory, critical indigenous methodologies, and other museum examples reviewed in the following pages.

In Chapter 2 I identified various problems of representing the “other” in the context of postcolonial discourse. I briefly traced the rise of the postcolonial critique through the writings of Edward Said (1978), Frantz Fanon (1952,1961), Gayatri Spivak (1993), Achille Mbembe (2001), et al. I problematized how concepts of authority, authenticity, temporality, and definitions of the “object” are rooted in colonial frameworks that have been reproduced in the museum venue, specifically in the representation of Native American cultures. Lastly, I demonstrated how a transformation of representation is occurring in museum venues where Indigenous communities and individuals are exercising greater authority in the display, interpretation, and stewardship of their cultural material. I included examples such as: the employment of “indigenous curation” (Kreps 2003) by Dayak community members at the Museum Balanga in Indonesia, the negotiation of local knowledge and non-profit museum management in the Zuni A:shiwí A:wán Museum and Heritage Center, and the care of traditional objects in the Aboriginal cultural centers or keeping places in Australia.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the major themes in Navajo weaving literature through a postcolonial lens of interpretation. I argued that past ethnographies and studies of Navajo history, art, and culture were often framed from non-Navajo perspectives that committed many of the errors of “misrepresentation” identified in Chapter 2. More recently however, in light of postcolonialism, scholars became more inclusive and reflexive in the exploration of Navajo weaving culture. A survey of Navajo weaving exhibitions demonstrated the myriad modes of representation ranging from the non-Native institution that displays Native art to the community tribal museum displaying its own material

culture. Interviews conducted with museum staff at institutions that hosted two separate exhibitions on the topic of Navajo male weavers offered unique insight into the process of exhibition making in two distinct venues. The information presented here formed the background research for the exhibition installation described in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the transformation of my ideas concerning decolonizing methodologies and collaboration in light of my exhibition experience with Roy Kady. I explained how my initial ethical concerns with exhibition practice led me to employ these methodologies, a realization that only came about through the process of collaboration itself. Scholars such as Moira Simpson and Linda Tuhiwai Smith figured prominently in critical reflections of our exhibition. Simpson explains,

During the era of post-colonialism, museums and communities have begun to enter into collaborative partnerships in research, exhibition presentation, archive acquisition, contemporary collecting, and other areas of museology, and have undertaken projects of primary benefit to the communities ... collaborative activities of this nature have proven beneficial not just to the community but to the museum as well, as they change completely the traditional relationship between the museum anthropologist or ethnographer and the community. [Simpson 1996:265]

The relational change that Simpson identified 15 years ago is still on going today. In fact, the necessity to define collaboration as an institutional imperative in museum practice is perhaps more crucial in light of the 20 year anniversary of the NAGPRA passage.¹³

Thus, collaboration can and should figure prominently in ethical standards for current

¹³ *NAGPRA at 20: Conversations about the Past, Present, and Future of NAGPRA* was a two-day public symposium organized by the National NAGPRA Program and held in Washington, DC on November 15-16, 2010. The purpose of the event was to critically evaluate the first two decades of NAGPRA through case studies, workshops, and featured speakers.

museum practice, more than just an ideal methodology. However, despite its widespread recognition as an ethical principle, the specific definitions and applications still widely vary according to the category of each relationship and type of project. The utility of collaboration should be judged by the precedent it establishes for museums to work more inclusively with Native communities in exhibitions, educational programming, collections care, and board advisory. The efficacy of various collaborative strategies warrants further research as suggested by other scholars in this discipline.

In Chapter 5, I elucidated the evolution of my collaborative relationship with Roy: how we conceived of the project themes, the development of interpretive material, public perceptions of the exhibition, and a critical reflection of the challenges we faced during our collaborative process. In the development of exhibit material I illustrated how the past museological and anthropological legacies of misrepresentation described in Chapters 2 and 3 informed various decisions in our planning process as an attempt to “decolonize” our exhibition. Furthermore, this experience allowed me to negotiate the complexity of collaborative exhibition practice, as well as providing new ways for me to connect to my own cultural heritage. While I cite many examples of collaborative and decolonizing projects from the literature in Chapter 4, my project is unique in that it details the collaborative process and relationship between two members of the same tribal community. In a spectrum of exhibition projects, a collaboration between two Native individuals would seemingly represent the “epitome” of so-called decolonizing practice. However, collaboration—even with two members of the same tribal community—is not in and of itself a panacea for decolonizing misrepresentations in the museum. In fact, this

case study revealed a new set of issues in collaboration perhaps not so visible in other examples from the literature. With the playing field leveled, so to speak, between tribal and institutional authority inequalities, a new set of differences emerged in our collaboration: age, knowledge systems, language, time and planning perceptions, and community responsibilities.

Ultimately, this thesis examines how our exhibition confronted the often-homogenized portrayal of Navajo subjectivities in museum exhibitions by presenting Roy as an individual weaver/artist who is *also* Navajo, not merely a “Navajo weaver.” Therefore, this title is not a given or an essentialized identification. Likewise, my subject position as a “Navajo curator/scholar” is much more complicated than such a title suggests. Due to these distinct identifications, in this thesis I was able to focus on the nuances of our relationship with each other and in relation to our tribal community that both enriched and challenged our collaborative process. Therefore, I have found that collaboration is not merely a methodology (as I originally imagined), but also an ethnographic locus where the terms of such a relationship are actively renegotiated through each new task we assumed.

Looking forward, I question how valuing Native knowledge through equal partnership in museum practice may help subvert past colonial power dynamics. Along with other scholars and museum practitioners theorizing on collaboration, I agree that a more nuanced understanding of collaborative and decolonizing methodologies in multiple contexts is necessary in order to ensure that our material and intangible culture may be more respectfully interpreted and cared for in museum institutions. Most importantly, the

relationships sustained through professional collaborations represent an evolving museological shift from object-centered to people-centered museum practice. Furthermore, collaboration as a decolonizing methodology is not limited to the museum venue. The goals and intentions of the exhibition described in this thesis are not unlike other projects with Native individuals working in education, cultural revitalization programs, libraries and archives, tribal history and oral narrative programs, the reclamation of “traditional” foods (also known as “food sovereignty”), and even Indigenous media initiatives that may bring together transnational and intertribal actors.

Through the course of this project, I have come to understand how a meaningful collaboration, in any project, entails an investment in personal as well as professional relationships. More broadly, the duration of these collaborative relationships should not be confined to a particular project or exhibition, but rather we should seek to create avenues for sustained interaction. Not only does this include the dissemination of results to all interested stakeholders but also the continuation of correspondence and the development of new projects with community members.

Future Endeavors

Building from the first iteration of our exhibition, *Na'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin (Chant of the Male Spider): A Holistic Journey with Diné Weaver Roy Kady*, a second installment is planned in conjunction with the Sheep is Life conference from June 20 through 25, 2011 at Diné College on the Navajo reservation. While we maintained the same basic concept of producing an interactive sensory environment from the original

exhibition, *Na'ashjé'ii Biyiin (Chant of the Spider): A Holistic Journey into Diné Fiber Arts* integrates more Navajo perspectives that were not possible in the inaugural exhibit (hence, the change of the exhibition title). Roy and I developed the exhibition concept based on the theme of “weaving utility” to once again challenge the regional design narratives that have dominated Navajo weaving representations since the establishment of the reservation. Interviews were conducted with three weavers about the three different categories of Navajo weaving Roy and I identified. The participating weavers, Roy Kady, TahNibaa Naataanii, and Gilbert Begay each provided personal insight about his or her particular weaving methods and inspirations that are presented on exhibit text panels. Each weaver will also participated in a community-oriented weaving discussion during the weeklong conference (see Appendix J for conference brochure and schedule).

Chant of the Spider is produced as a traveling banner exhibition that will also be on display at Mesa Library in Los Alamos, New Mexico and the Teec Nos Pos chapter community. Plans are currently underway to display the exhibit at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona, the Hubbell Trading Post in Ganado, Arizona and the United States Embassy in Quito, Ecuador as part of an intercultural exchange program in which Roy is currently involved. And so the journey continues.

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APPENDIX A

Name of Exhibit	Name of Museum	Exhibit Dates	Type of Visit
Weaving: The Story of Dine	Kristin Wigley-Fleming Gallery: Luther College	09/11/09 - 10/16/10	Online
Circle of Cottonwoods: Selected Teec Nos Pos Weavings from the Edwin L. and Ruth E. Kennedy Southwest Native American Collection	OU Kennedy Museum of Art	01/26/10 - 07/25/10	Online
Sky Imagery in Selected Sandpainting Weavings from the Edwin L. and Ruth E. Kennedy Southwest Native American Collection	OU Kennedy Museum of Art	01/26/10 - 07/25/10	Online
Navajo Weaving: Dreams, Schemes, and Stories	CU Museum of Natural History	10/02/09 - 02/04/10	In person
Diyogí ʼáá bil ʼÁnooséél Generations	Navajo Nation Museum	05/14/09 - 01/23/10	In person / Interview
Woven to Wear: Navajo and Hopi Textiles from The Durango Collection®	CSU Avenir Museum of Design & Merchandising	9/17/09 - 01/22/10	In person
Rainbow Yarn: Navajo Weavings, Germantown Yarns, and the Pennsylvania Connection	Lancaster Quilt and Textile Museum	06/09 - 12/31/09	Online
Navajo Weaving: Diamonds and Beyond	CU Museum of Natural History	05/29/09 - 10/01/09	In person
Weaving is Life	OU Kennedy Museum of Art	03/07 - 06/07	Online
Navajo Weaving: 19th Century Blankets, 20th Century Rugs, 21st Century Views	Arizona State Museum	10/04 - 05/05	Online
Men Who Weave, A Revival in Diné Bikyah	Navajo Nation Museum	08/05/04 - 01/15/05	Interview
Three Cultures of Master Weaving: Southwestern Textiles from the UCM Collection.	CU Museum of Natural History	04/19/04 - 10/17/04	Online
Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century: Selections from The Textile Museum Collections	The Textile Museum	09/05/03 - 03/14/04	Online
Authentic Navajo Weavings	John Wayne Airport	Summer/ Fall 2003	Online
Hosteen Klah, Nadle Hatali: Gender, Transformation, and Navajo Weaving	OU Kennedy Museum of Art	04/12/01 - 04/29/01	Online
The Navajo Weaving Tradition	Bruce Museum	1/15/01	Online
A Continuous Thread	Grace Hudson Museum	06/10/00 - 10/15/00	Online
Weaving in the Margins	Museum of Indian Arts and Culture	99-00	Interview
Stories Woven In: the Navajo Way of Seeing	Hearst Art Gallery: Saint Marys College	10/2/99 - 12/19/99	Online
Getzwiler Collection of Navajo Weavings	Nizhoni Ranch Gallery	01/23/99 - 04/18/99	Online
Navajo Weavings from the Getzwiler Collection	Desert Caballeros Western Museum	01/23/99 - 04/11/99	Online
The Song of the Loom	Montclair Art Museum	Fall 1987	Online

APPENDIX B

Male Weavers of Diné Nation: Our Stories and Experiences

Statement by Dr. Wesley Thomas included in *Weaving in the Margins* exhibition guide

For the longest time, it has been generally thought that women were the only weavers in Navajo society. The idea is stated in written text and documented in journals of military men from the previous century. From the Navajo perspective, male weavers have always been part of traditional Navajo history and culture. Male weavers are mentioned in our creation stories in the underworld, but this is not mentioned in the English versions of our Navajo stories. To hear of a Navajo man weaving draws questions and sometime blank looks from non-Navajo people and also from some contemporary Navajo.

Today, a handful of young boys and men continue to weave as our male ancestors did in the past. We are continuing the stories of our histories through weaving. Not only are we doing it because it is part of our history, but more importantly we weave because we have the urge and desire to express our creativity through weaving. Other men present their artistry through jewelry, painting, pottery, basketry and so forth. We do it through textile weaving, simply another form of continuing an artistic tradition.

Our stories are similar to those told about how Navajo women began weaving. We learned these stories from early childhood and through various stages of our lives on the Navajo Nation, and through trial and error. We learned how to weave with the help of our maternal kin: grandmother, mother, sister, female cousin and aunt.

Each one of us in this exhibition comes from a family where a female relative is a weaver. It is unusual for a male to be the only weaver within a Navajo family unit. Recently, the traditional extended Navajo family, headed by a female member, has been changing because of modern influences. Some families now incorporate paternal kin or have abandoned the extended family tradition, forming nuclear families.

Today, the size of the family now dictates what level of Navajo moral and ethical values we use to clarify the quality and quantity of our cultural beliefs. For example, if a monolingual elderly person is part of the extended family, the cultural values are considered to be strong and it certainly helps to define a place for a weaver, especially a male weaver.

Within the confines of these values and ethics, our places as male weavers are created, nurtured and maintained. We function by the same strict rules established for Navajo women as weavers through the stories of Spider Woman and her entourage when the Navajo world was first created. For example, our weaving tools are created with songs by our parents or grandparents. On a seasonal basis, our weaving tools and looms are blessed and re-blessed at Blessing Way ceremonies as our family members surround us. Moreover, most of us do not weave at night as the culture forbids it. It is believed, by traditional people, that Navajo weaving is personified and that our textiles are entitled to their nightly rest, similar to living beings. Nor do we use our weaving tools for anything except for what they were created: to weave textiles.

Due to the continuous changes in our culture, many of the younger male weavers are confronted with different sets of rules. Today, the weaving tools are readily

available and are marketed at social gatherings throughout the reservation. If not, they can be purchased in border towns where they are mass-produced. These are some of the struggles we are faced with in our attempts to retain our sacred cultural traditions and knowledge of weaving. Despite the rules changing around us as we sit at our looms weaving, we simply continue laying each weft and continue to tell our stories. These stories tell of the Navajo past, present, and our future.

For this exhibition, we as Navajo male weavers are speaking for ourselves and about our experiences in creating Navajo textiles. We are talking about ownership of our art and ourselves. Our parents, grandparents, clan members and other relatives gave these privileges to us. Just as our stories are told and handed over from one generation to the next, the art of weaving continues to travel the same path. Along the way, we bring in new designs, thoughts, and tools to integrate and adapt to produce a better textile. Still the method of weaving stays the same.

We still take from the earth to make our tools, the wool off the backs of our sheep and mohair from our goats to make the threads. We carry on the process of cleaning, carding, dyeing and spinning the wool and mohair, as our ancestors did. In our time, modern technology has helped to speed the process of bringing the wool to its final stage of being woven into the warp. Some of us still hear from our parents the stories as we weave, and a few hear the songs that accompany the various stages of weaving from our grandparents. Both bring more appreciation to what we do as weavers: the perpetuation of our culture.

In our stories we hear of men weaving in the past, some carrying the name or simply being called "The Weaver." Through erroneous translations of Navajo stories into English, it was believed that only women were the weavers in Navajo culture. In actuality, there has been a fine line between gender occupations within the culture for a long time and it continues to be so. A fixed space or occupation does not define gender roles in Navajo culture. Gender definitions clarify a space for each person within the culture. Due to that flexibility, the culture gives Navajo men permission to weave. Today, we weave to demonstrate our desire and to express our artistic needs, as any artist does. The occupation of weaving tends to enthrall our minds on a daily basis. Our environmental surroundings are captured in and presented through our finished products. The cultural permission has also moved Navajo weaving from being classified as a craft to that of an art form.

This legitimization has further empowered Navajo male weavers to be seen in public, much more than in the past. Before, our textiles were handed over to one of our maternal kin to sell on our behalf due to gender role stigmatization. Now, we weave and sell our products in public, along side our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts and so forth, or with other men.

Since only a handful of men are weaving now, this brings us into the sphere of exoticism. We are no different from Navajo women weavers. We carry out the process of weaving just the same as the women do, except that we are not restricted from weaving at certain times. Other than that, we, as male weavers, share the same laborious tasks of weaving as we have in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Weavers

Woven Representations: Navajo male weaver exhibitions and the changing depictions of culture in Native American museums.

For weavers and museum staff:

- Name
- Chapter house (if applicable)
- Museum institution affiliation
 - Staff?
 - Weaver?
- 1. With which exhibit did you participate?
- 2. What was your role in the exhibit?
- 3. How long was your involvement?

For weavers:

1. How do you feel about being a male weaver?
2. How do you feel about the museum representing your work?
3. How do you feel about museums in general? About Native museums?
4. Who do you feel the exhibit was addressing? (audience)
5. Were you satisfied with how the exhibit addressed this audience?
6. How do you think museums should work with Native artists?
7. Do you feel the museum met these expectations?
8. What should the museum's role be for Native people?
9. Would you change anything with how the exhibit was presented/ carried out?

APPENDIX D

Post-Exhibit Interview Questions for Roy

- 1) How do you perceive of the collaborative relationship that MIAC established with weavers in their exhibition?
- 2) How do you perceive of the collaborative relationship that the Navajo Nation Museum established with weavers in their exhibition?
- 3) How do you perceive of our collaborative relationship in our exhibition?
- 4) What his side of his collaboration?
- 5) What was the difference between ours and the other exhibits?
- 6) What aspects about the exhibit and our collaboration did you particularly like or enjoy?
- 7) What aspects about the exhibit and our collaboration did you dislike or would have changed?
- 8) What challenges do you perceive that we faced in our exhibit?
- 9) What suggestions do you have for our next collaborative project?
- 10) What aspects of the exhibition would you like to keep in tact?
 - dye station
 - wool station
- 11) Would you like to borrow pieces again?
- 12) What type of media should we incorporate? (film/music?)
- 13) How many weavers should we display? How can I contact them?
- 14) Should we include more information about weaving history? The process? The inspiration? The sheep? We should focus on one of these themes and organize the text around it.
- 15) Do you want to keep the plant/animal/weaver configuration?

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Woven Representations: Navajo male weaver exhibitions and the changing depictions of culture in Native American museums.

You are invited to participate in a study that will analyze the representation of Navajo male weavers in the museum context that will aid in the study of Native museum representation as a whole. In addition, this study is being conducted in part to fulfill the requirements of the researcher's Masters degree in Anthropology and Museum Studies at the University of Denver. The study will be conducted by Teresa Montoya. Results will be used to gain a better understanding of those who are represented in exhibits but also to gain an insight into the museum institutions who display Native objects. An assessment will be made about which museum methods are most appropriate in regards to Native populations and material from the perspective of both staff and participant. In addition, this project seeks to work in collaboration with all participants at any level with which they are comfortable. Teresa Montoya can be reached at teresa.montoya@du.edu or 619-212-3696. Her graduate research advisor, Dr. Christina Kreps, can also be reached at ckreps@du.edu or 303- 871 2688.

Participation in this study should take about 60 minutes of your time. Participation will involve responding to questions about your involvement in a previous exhibit on the theme of Navajo male weavers. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign below if you understand and agree to the statements above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *Woven Representations*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please agree or disagree to the following:

I agree to have my identity revealed in the study's publications OR I want to keep my identity anonymous in the study's publications

I agree to be audiotaped OR I do not agree to be audiotaped.

I agree to be included in the researcher's museum exhibit OR I do not agree to be included in the researcher's museum exhibit.

I would like to be consulted about the researcher's progress as the study is still being conducted (i.e.: provide input about how the information will be presented and disseminated in thesis and exhibit form).

I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address: _____

Upon conclusion of the researcher's study and masters exhibit how do you want the information you provided (including audio tapes) to be handled?:

Destroyed

Sent to you via mail

Donated to one of the museums

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions for Museum Staff

Woven Representations: Navajo male weaver exhibitions and the changing depictions of culture in Native American museums.

For weavers and museum staff:

- Name
- Chapter house (if applicable)
- Museum institution affiliation
 - Staff?
 - Weaver?
- 4. With which exhibit did you participate?
- 5. What was your role in the exhibit?
- 6. How long was your involvement?

For museum staff:

1. How did you contribute to collaboration?
2. What is the museum's policy on collaboration?
3. What was the goal of the exhibit?
4. Who was the intended audience?
5. How was the idea for the exhibit conceived?
6. How did the museum contact the male weavers?
7. Do you feel the weavers were accurately represented?
8. Was the theme of the exhibit authentic in its representation?
9. Would you change anything with how the exhibit was presented/ carried out?

APPENDIX G

Na'ashjé'ii Bika' Biyiin

Chant of the Male Spider: A holistic journey with Diné weaver Roy Kady EVALUATION

Please circle the appropriate selection:

I am a: student / faculty / staff at _____ school -
Other

I am: Non-Native American Native American

If you are Native, what is your tribal affiliation?

How did you learn about this exhibit?

Email invitation - Invitation by mail - Radio - Print media

Facebook - From a friend - Other (write in
please) _____

Please briefly answer the following:

1) What did you know about Navajo culture and/or weaving prior to seeing this exhibit?

2) How did this exhibit add to your knowledge of Navajo culture and/or weaving?

3) What do you think about the manner in which Navajo culture was represented in this exhibit?

4) Do you particularly like or dislike anything in the exhibit?

5) Based on what you saw in this exhibit do you want to learn more about Navajo culture? How would you do this?

6) Would you attend another Native themed event at the University of Denver?

APPENDIX H

Object List

Weavings

- Dragon Fly – Loan from Laura Rice
- Looking Towards the Carrizo – Loan from Roy Kady
- San Juan River – Loan from Caroline Hussman
- Home of the Buffalo – Loan from John and Lily Johansson
- Horse Song – Loan from Veronica Bauers
- Northern Lights Set – Loan from Al Snipes
- Saddle blanket
- Lead rope
- Two horse cinches
- Blue Cloud set – Loan from Roy Kady
- Felted saddle pad
- Saddle blanket
- Bridle
- Horse cinch
- A zigzag lightening pattern Teec Nos Pos style rug (woven by Mary K. Clah) -
Loan from Roy Kady
- Guardians weaving in progress - Loan from Roy Kady
- Diamond twill weaving in progress - Loan from Roy Kady
- Horse cinch weaving in progress - Loan from Roy Kady
- Woman's rug dress - Loan from Roy Kady
- Square pattern twill weaving - Loan from Roy Kady
- Black and yellow woven purse - Loan from Roy Kady

Tools – All loaned from Roy Kady

- Set of six weaving combs carved by Al Snipes
- Two lap spindles
- One set of cards
- Two wooden upright looms
- Four battens, sticks

Plant Station – All loaned from Roy Kady

- Five large red bowls
- Seven small blue bowls
- Sage
- Yucca plant and root
- Cliffrose
- Navajo Tea
- Juniper Mistletoe
- Carnegie Dock Root

- Rabbit Brush
- Black Walnut
- Sheep manure
- White clay and sand

Dye station (dyes in mason jars) – All loaned from Roy Kady

- Osage Orange Wood Chip dye
- Navajo Tea dye
- Black Walnut dye
- Prickly Pear plant dye
- Prickly Pear fruit dye
- Logwood Chip dye
- Alkanet Root dye
- Indigo Cake dye
- Mordents: gypsum, copper, iron, potassium alum
- Framed dye chart

Animal miscellaneous – All loaned from Roy Kady

- Four lbs raw wool (black, brown, white)
- Two lbs vegetal dyed yarn
- Natural wool skeins
- Four sheep pelts
- One white wool roving

Dedication cases miscellaneous – All loaned from Roy Kady

- Two ceremonial baskets
- One scarf (grandmother)
- One sheep bell
- One braided rope
- One gourd
- One abalone shell with herbs
- One pipe and corncob lighter
- One carved sheep fetish (stone)
- One sheep figurine (wood and wool)
- One sheep tobacco pouch (leather)

APPENDIX I

Hors d'oeuvre Menu

Navajo Steamed Corn in Corn Broth and Chives

Maple Sweetened Butternut Squash Tarts with Roasted Colorado Plateau Pine Nuts

Searched Navajo-Churro Lamb with Caramelized Onions and Navajo Sumac Sauce on
Crostoni

Agave Nectar Sweetened Blue Corn Puree

Navajo Roasted Corn Cake with Cranberries

Wild Navajo Tea with Mint and Cucumber

Prepared by: Chef Freddie J. Bitsoie

*15850 N Thompson Peak Parkway #2045 Scottsdale AZ 85260 480.299.9187
Freddie@FJBits.com*

APPENDIX J

15th Annual Sheep is Life Celebration brochure with *Na'ashjé'ii Biyiin (Chant of the Spider): A Holistic Journey into Diné Fiber Arts* exhibit insert:



"Na'ashjé'ii Biyiin: Chant of the Spider" A Holistic Journey into Diné Fiber Arts

Hatathli Museum, 4th Floor,
Diné College, Tsaile Campus

Hours: Monday–Friday, June 20–24,
9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (MDT)

Interpretive presentations and film screenings daily.

The exhibit, "Chant of the Spider", explores the interconnected spiritual and technical processes of Diné weaving from the perspectives of contemporary Diné fiber artists.

Gilbert Begay, Roy Kady, and TahNibaa Naataanii share personal stories, traditions, and relationships with the natural environment that inspire their creative processes.

Visitors can touch, smell, taste, and participate in this reflective exercise through the interactive exhibit environment.

Lecture and Reception
Friday, June 24, 4–7 p.m.
Chef Freddie Bitsoie
Contemporary Interpretations of Diné Cuisine

Teresa Montoya, Exhibit Curator, with
Roy Kady and Freddie Bitsoie

Funded in part by



Diné be' iiná, Inc.



Celebrate in 2011!
20th Anniversary, Diné be' iiná, Inc.
25th Anniversary, Navajo–Churro Association

Sheep is Life is an annual celebration presented by Diné be' iiná, Inc. (DBI), a nonprofit organization founded in 1991 by Diné shepherds and weavers.

DBI's mission is to restore the balance between Diné culture, life, and land. Its activities provide leadership, economic development, and support for maintaining Navajo lifeways, with a focus on sheep, wool, and fiber arts.

Diné be' iiná, Inc.
PO Box 683
Window Rock, AZ 86515
T: 505.406.7428 / info@navajolifeway.org
www.navajolifeway.org

Location

Sheep is Life is held in the Navajo Nation. Outdoor activities are at the Rodeo Grounds on the Diné College Tsaile Campus. Exhibit and Weaving Sale are in the 4th floor museum, Ned Hatathli Cultural Center. Enter the campus from Highway 64, 28 miles north of Chinle.

Lodging

Free camping at the Rodeo Grounds; no hook-ups. Local B&B accommodations are available. The closest hotels are in Chinle, Window Rock and St. Michaels. See the web site for maps and travel information.

Request a Discover Navajo Visitor's Guide at www.discovernavajo.com or 928-810-8501.

All times are Mountain Daylight Time (MDT).

RMA United States Department of Agriculture
Risk Management Agency

15TH ANNUAL SHEEP IS LIFE CELEBRATION



**JUNE 20-25, 2011
DINÉ COLLEGE CAMPUS
TSAILÉ, ARIZONA,
NAVAJO NATION**

**PRESENTED BY
DINÉ BE' IINÁ, INC.**



15TH ANNUAL SHEEP IS LIFE CELEBRATION

Celebrate Navajo Lifeways & Fiber Arts

The 15th Annual Sheep is Life Celebration honors the central role of sheep and fiber arts in cultures throughout the world. Everyone is invited to free events at the Sheep Camp and Rodeo Grounds on Friday and Saturday, June 24 and 25, at Diné College in Tsailé, AZ, Navajo Nation.

Programs for all ages include:

- Sheep to Loom Hands-on Learning
- Juried Navajo-Churro Sheep & Wool Shows
- Outdoor Museum and Youth Activities
- Horse, Dog, and Llama Trainings
- Traditional Livestock Management Practices
- Cultural, Educational, and Lifeway Presentations
- Arts, Crafts and Food Vendors
- Evening Storytelling and Games at the Sheep Camp
- Juried Diné Weaving Sale and Exhibit, Hatathli Museum
- Check schedules at www.navajolifeway.org

Diné Fiber Arts and Lifeways Workshops

Monday – Friday, June 20–24, 2011

Basic Navajo Weaving
Ilene Naegle. \$430. M – F, 9–4.

Horse Cinch Weaving
Roy Kady. \$210. M – Tu, 9–4.

Beginning Navajo Sash Belt
Gilbert Begay. \$350. Tu – Th, 9–4.

Navajo Dyeing with Native Plants
Edith & Evelyn Simonson. \$200. W – Th, 9–4

Butchering & Preparing Sheep the Navajo Way
Ron Garnanez. \$250. W, 8–5.

Felting with Navajo-Churro Wool
Instructor TBA. \$110. Th, 9–4.

Making Crème and Sun Screen
Ron Garnanez. \$110. Th, 8–noon.

Preparing Wool the Navajo Way
Ron Garnanez. \$110. Th, 1–5.

Navajo Basic Hand Spinning and Carding
Edith Simonson. \$100. Th, 9–4.

Marketing and Business for Sheep Producers
Cindy Dvergsten. \$50. W, 8:30–4:30.

Grazing to Grow Pasture
Cindy Dvergsten. \$50. Th, 8:30–4:30.

Register on-line at www.navajolifeway.org or print and mail the registration form.

Help continue Diné weaving traditions by making a tax-deductible donation to DBI's tuition waiver fund. Diné be' iiná, Inc. is a nonprofit 501c3 organization; donations are tax-deductible as provided for in the federal IRS Code.

The 15th Annual Sheep is Life Celebration is presented with support from the Land Grant Office, Diné College, USDA Risk Management Agency, Arizona Humanities Council, businesses, and private donors