The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
College of Arts and Architecture

BUILDING STRONG BRIDGES BETWEEN THE MUSEUM AND ITS COMMUNITY:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CULTURE AND SYSTEMS OF
ONE COMMUNITY’S ART MUSEUM

A Dissertation in
Art Education

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a holistic, qualitative, ethnographic case study of a medium-size art museum in the Midwestern United States based on interviews with all levels of staff and board members, community leaders, visitors, and educators. I combine interviews with participant observation in order to bring to light how the museum is connected to its community. I also explore how the museum’s services, including exhibitions and programs, and other practices influence the museum’s visitorship and perceptions among community members. By using a theoretical framework of an organization as an open system and cultural place, I understand the art museum as a complex organization where various interactions and relationships are interwoven to create its unique institutional culture.

The analysis allows me to identify the museum’s challenges and offer suggestions about how it can become more actively involved with its community and more relevant to it. I conclude that while the museum is a cultural and open system that is flexible and has coevolved with its community, it can overcome its challenges by becoming a learning organization whose members are working, learning, and growing together to become a more active and relevant organization in the community for years to come. My overarching goal is to urge museum professionals and art educators to learn the value of being a learning organization, adopt practices that promote such an organization, and continuously learn to work together.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is a team endeavor. At the beginning of this project, my professors and peers were instrumental in helping me form a research topic and questions that were personally meaningful and important to the field. My ideas and perspectives were thoroughly informed and expanded by the work of countless authors and scholars that I studied. I could not have completed my studies without the emotional and financial support of my parents in South Korea, and my husband, Michael, here with me. I also could not have conducted this research without the permission and support from the Avery Art Museum and participants. I thank Dr. Mary Ann Stankiewicz for guiding me throughout my doctoral studies at Penn State. Her advice was thoughtful, critical, and invaluable. I thank my doctoral committee members, Charles Garoian, Tina Thompson, and Madhu Prakash for supporting me with critical viewpoints, constructive criticism, and warm cheers. I also thank my former mentor, Dr. David Ebitz, for encouraging me to explore an art museum holistically in my dissertation work, rather than feeling confined to focus on the educational aspect exclusively. Lastly, I thank my editors, Erika Reutzel-Bechtel and Tsultrim Datso, for helping me with the exhaustive revision process. The teamwork, collaboration, and tremendous support I have enjoyed have greatly contributed to the quality of my dissertation project. My sincere hope is that in the field of museum studies and art education, this study will become a collaborative component in the work of other students, scholars, and professionals who strive to make art museums and education more inclusive and engaging.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I grew up in South Korea where public school education is very structured and controlled. As a student in the public school system in South Korea for 12 years, I did not enjoy how little freedom I had as a student to choose what and how I wanted to study. Often I had to conform to prescribed schedules for the high school and college entrance exams. Memorizing and taking standardized tests were daunting and boring tasks for me. I dreamed of becoming an art teacher in public school where I could give intellectual freedom to students rather than forcing them to perfect a set curriculum. When I finally did my student teaching at a local high school for two months during my senior year in college, I immediately knew that it was not for me. Teaching at a public school was as frustrating as being a student there—I found myself struggling with the standardized curriculum that is decided by authorities and confronted limited freedom in applying my own educational philosophy in teaching. My experience as a student and student teacher in the public school system in South Korea steered me towards informal learning, especially in museums, where learning takes place rather casually on a personal level. I believed learning could be more effective and enjoyable when learners have the freedom to influence their own learning methods and experiences. Learning takes place everywhere. Either it is forced or not, it is as natural as breathing and living (Falbel, 1993).

This view of education is closely related to systems theory or the cultural approach to educational organizations, which are seen as learning institutions that are growing and learning holistically. People who work in an organization are human beings, and their actions and thinking processes are flexible and unpredictable (Senge, 2006). Students and teachers in schools are also organic beings who are flexible and changing. Therefore, looking at organizations or
learning institutions as fixed entities that can be squarely controlled may cause the unnecessary stress and constraints that many students, teachers, and professionals often experience.

Because of my experience and theorization of learning, I initially approached museums with this organic viewpoint. I saw museums as flexible, growing, and organic entities that are closely connected with the surrounding environments, including the culture, economy, and demographics of communities that they serve. According to Gregory Bateson (2000) and Fritjof Capra (1996), all human beings, species, and natural ecosystems are interconnected and interdependent, thus forming a web of life. Therefore, human-created societies and organizations are also ecological, having characteristics of organisms and natural ecosystems (Bateson, 2000). Based on the ecological perspective, I theorized museums as social ecosystems as if they were living organisms. Through reading more literature in organization and management theories, I found that there is a school of theories that views organizations, such as museums and schools, as open systems and cultural entities where involved individuals collectively create a unique institutional culture (Handy, 1993; Senge, 2006). These organizations are not fixed but continuously changing, evolving, and learning. Peter Senge (2006) theorizes this type of organization as a learning organization. According to this view, each organization is unique because organizations are composed of groups of people who co-create their own organizational culture in unpredictable ways. Therefore, in order to be most effective, management approaches must incorporate an understanding of the interconnectedness of relationships and the culture of their environments. I rely on the conceptual framework of my case study museum in this dissertation as an open system and cultural place, investigating relationships among involved members and environments.
I strive to find various connections and disconnections between a museum and its community through examining one community’s art museum within its cultural, economic, and social contexts. In this way, I find ways for the museum to be a more active and relevant organization in the community. As I explained in the previous paragraph discussing my theoretical framework, museums are cultural, messy, growing, and complex organizations that cannot be fully understood by one ethnographic study because they are constantly changing due to the shifting interests and needs of museum staff members, visitors, and the community in general. Museums are complex organizations that influence and are influenced by their surrounding environments, including their particular focus, mission and vision, history, location, size, community, and employee base, which can be summed up as the institutional culture. In this study, therefore, I unpack the culture and systems that show how a museum functions in complex relation to its community. The picture that I draw in this dissertation is not perfect or just pretty but includes messy and sometimes negative multiple realities of the museum.

**Research Questions**

I specifically focus on connections and disconnections between 1) the museum and surrounding community, 2) museum services (exhibitions and programs) and visitorship and perceptions of the museum among community members, and 3) work culture and overall practices of the museum. This approach yielded three overarching research questions for the dissertation. I articulate each research question below.

1. How is an art museum connected to its community?

2. How do the museum’s primary services (exhibitions and programs) and practices influence the museum’s visitorship and perceptions among community members?
3. What is the work culture of the Avery Art Museum, and how does the work culture influence the museum’s overall practice?

These are the research questions that prompted me to design and conduct this doctoral study. My study tells a story of the Avery Art Museum, a medium-sized art museum in the Midwestern United States. As they work to overcome challenges, the Avery staff members are striving to make the museum more relevant to local community members and to be active in the community. The museum is active and relevant in that it has popular educational programs for K-12 school children and some of their previous and current exhibitions are considered appealing to local community members. However, it also has challenges. Community members perceive the museum as an elitist institution for a handful of well-educated and economically comfortable people, and staff members describe the work culture of the Avery as non-active and less collaborative. I discuss the museum’s challenges further in Chapters Six and Seven.

This study examines the whole museum in its geographical and demographic community rather than studying either the museum separately from its community or one part of the museum such as its educational or curatorial functions. I decided to closely and deeply examine an established art museum working everyday in its community.

In this first chapter, I introduce methodology, briefly describe the case study museum and its community, explain my rationale for choosing the Avery, and acknowledge my assumptions and limitations of the study. I also discuss the research background based upon my personal experiences and the study’s intellectual significance to the field of museum studies and art education. Next, I explain the target audience and the goals of the study. I end the chapter by outlining the remainder of the dissertation.
Introduction to Methodology

Because of the complex functioning of a museum, ethnography is a suitable tool for illuminating the subtle interaction of the culture of the museum and its community. In addition, in the cultural approach to organization studies, ethnographic methods are considered one of the best tools for understanding the culture and systems of an organization in relation to its surroundings (Geertz, 1973). I use most of the data collection methods from the traditional ethnographic approach used with anthropology, which has often been used to study cultures outside of mainstream Western cultures (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 2008). Fields of study such as education have adopted ethnography as a methodology, using ethnographic techniques such as interviews and participant-observations to understand the culture of formal and informal institutions within the larger context of the subject being studied (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gilmore & Glatthorn, 1982). Therefore, ethnography enables one to study relations and other connected qualities in a comprehensive and complete way. Chapter Three: Methodology—Ethnographic Case Study further explains this methodology. This study will provide a new perspective on the operation of small- to medium-sized museums since this type of ethnographic study about a museum in its larger surroundings is rarely used.

Ethnographic inquiry is holistic because it is conducted within the context of surrounding environments and includes the researcher as an important part of the research setting. It also includes detailed descriptions and narrative stories of the multiple voices of participants. Since I was not able to find relevant studies that used a holistic ethnographic approach in the field of museum education or museum studies, I looked broadly at literature available in the field of general education. I studied two ethnographic studies before I designed my own: Tangled up in
School: Politics, Space, Bodies, and Signs in the Educational Process authored by Jan Nespor (1997) and Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood by Jay MacLeod (2009). Both Nespor and MacLeod use a holistic research approach that allows researchers to look at interrelated connections among subjects being investigated within the surrounding contexts. It is their holistic approach and narrative writing style that inspired my research. These two studies are good examples of narrative ethnographic study as they are composed of a series of narrative stories, dialogues, and interactions with participants as well as researchers’ feelings and reflections during the data collection process.

Nespor’s (1997) study supports the view that schools are social places located within a unique context of personal, economic, and political settings (Nespor, 1997). To make his case, Nespor (1997) explores not only children’s interactions and learning at school but also carefully considers their surroundings, including the economic, cultural, and political relations that shape their learning experiences. His approach to the subject matter is holistic because he studies children’s educational experiences through many layers of context, surroundings, and perspectives. Nespor’s approach to education can be applied to an art museum. An art museum can be better understood when relationships among various elements of the museum are investigated. In addition, the museum’s educational and social impact cannot be understood without examining the community’s understanding of the museum.

MacLeod’s (2009) study is similar in methodology and general approach to Nespor’s in that he investigates a social phenomenon through looking at the surrounding elements and context using ethnography rather than just focusing on the subject under investigation. For example, his study investigates how social reproduction (e.g., inequity reproduced from one generation to another) is actualized in two distinctive brotherhood groups in a socio-
economically depressed area of the United States. He investigates the boys’ personal, educational, social, and economic lives in order to understand their culture holistically (MacLeod, 2009). In other words, rather than just observing and interviewing two groups of boys and looking at narrow aspects such as race and poverty level, he investigates their surroundings and personal life, such as family situations, school life, and their relationships to other peers and teachers. This study is conducted over a long period of time; the approach to the subject is multi-faceted and ecological, including the surrounding networks of the two groups.

Like Nespor and MacLeod’s works, my study is based on the premise that we can best understand social phenomena when we study them in relation to surrounding communities and socio-economic elements, thus I explore the Avery’s relationship with its community. Likewise, as Nespor (1997) points out, an institution made up of people cannot be understood in isolation. Its interconnected relationships must be carefully considered. While these studies convincingly demonstrate the value of taking surrounding relationships into consideration, no study to date has applied these methods to museums, in particular, with the same level of rigor as in this study.

However, I found an ethnographic study in the form of a book chapter: “Museum in Family Life: An Ethnographic Case Study” by Kristen M. Ellenbogen (2002). She examines the lives of a frequent museum-visiting family in order to understand the social processes of family learning in museums and to offer theoretical ground for studies of family life in museum learning. The study focuses on one frequent museum-going family’s learning experiences and leisure patterns over the course of six months using ethnographic methodology involving interviews and observations, often utilized in educational research rather than the traditional ethnographic approach used in the field of anthropology (Ellenbogen, 2002). In doing so, Ellenbogen (2002) describes the role of museums within the larger context of the family culture.
While her study uses the same methodology of the ethnographic case study as my research and she adopts a holistic research approach as she includes the larger cultural context of the family, Ellenbogen focuses on one family’s learning experiences in museums within the context of the family’s social patterns. Therefore, the scope of her study is more narrowly focused than mine.

**My Role as an Active Member**

While I entered the research setting as an outsider, a person beyond the natural setting of the museum, my work evolved in ways where I felt that more active participation in certain cases would provide greater access to understanding the museum and community under investigation. In order to observe every possible aspect of the museum and its operations, I attended almost all staff, committee, and board meetings during the three-month period. I volunteered for several museum events and programs as well as participated in special events, lectures, tours, and art talks. I even helped install one of the shows during the summer of 2011. In taking on these volunteer roles, my research role expanded to include that of “active-member-researcher” as described in the article, “Observational Techniques,” by Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (1994).

Adler and Adler (1994) introduce four levels of membership roles in qualitative research settings: 1) the complete-member-researcher, 2) active-member-researcher, 3) peripheral-member-researcher, and 4) complete-observer. Researchers in a complete membership role are already members of the research setting. For example, if a staff member of a museum studies his or her own museum setting and its practice, the person is taking on a complete membership position as a researcher. Researchers who take an active membership role are not legitimate members of the research setting but are involved with the setting’s central goals, activities, and responsibilities. Researchers in a peripheral membership role value the insiders’ perspectives and
are also closely involved with the research setting while not participating in actual activities or taking on responsibilities. Lastly, researchers who take a *complete observer* role are fundamentally removed from the research setting—often engaged with videotaping, audio recording, or photographing.

I was not a staff member of the museum, so taking an active member position, by volunteering and helping in the daily tasks, programs, and events of the museum, was the best way that I could closely observe the interactions of others. In doing so, I was able to converse casually with various staff members, which made them more comfortable participating in my study. In addition, by the middle of data collection period, staff members became to feel that it was almost natural for me to be in the museum building interacting with them and with visitors, which allowed me to be an integrated element of the museum setting. None of these comfortable interactions would have happened if I had taken researcher-in-peripheral or complete observer positions. When I was about to finish the data collection period on site, several staff members told me that it would feel unnatural to not see me at the museum after I was gone.

However, being a stranger in a completely new environment is not easy. I considered myself as a double stranger: one who is from a different country and also new to the place where I conducted my study. I sometimes felt uncomfortable and had a sense of not belonging to the museum. For example, when I went to the annual gala event in June 2012, during the beginning period of data collection, I found myself standing alone or trying to be part of conversations but not being able to do that fully. This could be a natural feeling because I was a stranger after all, and it takes time to build relationships. Especially when you do not share years of experience in terms of work and being a member of the community together, it is difficult to find common ground for speaking with one another. Sometimes, I had to tell myself that it is okay to bother
people a little bit and sit in on various staff meetings. Nevertheless, I overcame my shyness and uncomfortable feelings in order to collect rich data that would also benefit the museum.

**Description of the Case Study Museum**

To protect confidentiality, I am using pseudonyms for the name of the museum, its location, and all participants (see Appendix A). In addition, citation information containing elements that could identify participants or the case study museum or its location has been withheld. For example, I do not refer to the state the museum is in but rather the Midwest is used; River City is used instead of the metropolitan area name; and Watertown replaces the actual city name.

The central piece of the study is the case study of the Avery Art Museum, located in Watertown, the largest city in the River City area. River City is a medium-sized metropolitan area in the Midwest comprising several cities and towns. River City has an estimated population under 400,000. Farming and heavy manufacturing are the dominant industries in the area, and 20% of the population holds a bachelor’s degree or higher. Thus, River City is largely a blue-collar community.

The Avery was originally established as a municipal gallery in 1925. The museum was privatized in 2003 and in 2005 opened its new facilities in downtown Watertown. However, to help the transition, the museum still receives 30% of its budget from the City of Watertown, though this may end in the year 2024. Before privatization, the City of Watertown provided funding and hired employees. Afterwards, the museum created new positions, such as fundraising and marketing that were previously provided by the city. Currently, 70% of museum funding is from admissions, memberships, store revenue, rental services, and fundraising. The
Avery Foundation\(^1\), established by an affluent family with money earned from a banking business, donated about 13 million dollars toward the 50 million-dollar construction project. After the museum moved to the current location and was privatized, its targeted areas expanded from serving only Watertown to include the greater River City area. Therefore, I do not limit the Avery’s community to Watertown but include the entire River City area.

While the size of the building is quite large, approximately 120,000 square feet, the museum employs only 16 full-time staff members and five part-time visitor services staff along with a number of volunteers, docents, and interns (in the summer of 2011 when I did my on-site research). The annual operating budget is about two million dollars, and the education and curatorial budgets are approximately $60,000-70,000 and $100,000, respectively. Many of the museum programs and exhibitions are funded by grants. The museum mostly collects American, European, Haitian, Mexican, and Asian art and has about 4,000 items in the collection. Approximately 60,000-70,000 people visit the museum each year. I will describe the River City community and the Avery Art Museum, including the museum’s organization structure, departments, and staff in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

**Rationale for Selecting the Avery as the Research Site**

There are three reasons why I chose the Avery for my case study. First, with the Avery I could tell a story of a small- to medium-sized art museum that has a homogeneous rather than diverse population, which does not strongly support the visual arts and arts education. Second, I selected the Avery because I had never visited the museum or its geographical region prior to data collection. I thought I would study such a museum and community with fresher eyes than studying a museum that I am familiar with or had worked in. Third, through my initial study of

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\(^1\) The Avery Foundation is a private, charitable, non-operating foundation.
the Avery, I found that its staff members are trying to reach out to diverse community members and, therefore, they welcomed an outside researcher to the building.

The majority of published studies in the museum field highlight best practices of successful museums in highly populated metropolitan areas, such as Houston, TX, or London, UK (Marzio, 1998; Nightingale, 2011). My experience at professional and academic conferences confirms that studies in the field focus on museums that are larger and more successful with substantial financial and human resources. Much less is known about how small- to medium-sized museums with more limited funding and human resources are relevant and active in their communities. These museums, often located in more homogenous areas, face characteristic challenges in connecting with their communities and providing meaningful experiences for them. In addition, studies of small museums have not included the specific detail available from many diverse staff and community members unless the museum is widely recognized as successful. I chose the Avery to address this gap in academic museum studies.

Also since I had never visited the museum or its region, I could be more objective. I do not use the word *objective* as if there is only one objective view of the Avery. Rather, I use this word to present my approach to understanding the Avery through inclusion of as many diverse views as possible from participants. Without the inputs and perspectives of others, my study would be based on my personal assumptions and theories. Nevertheless, I had assumptions and biases about the Avery and the Midwest before I started collecting data, which I will explain below in the Assumptions and Limitations section in this chapter.

Another reason for my choice was the fact that during my early exploration, I was told that Avery staff members wanted to develop the museum’s identity as a community-based learning center. The director of the Museum Studies program at the Midwestern University
affiliated with the Avery gave me a great deal of information about the museum and encouraged me to come to River City to study it because she thought it would benefit the museum. I felt that if they cared about making the museum an active part of the community, it would better inform my research questions about how the museum is part of the community and what it can do to be a more valuable, relevant, and effective organization there. The museum’s desire to be community-oriented and to relate art to people’s lives can be seen on its website as part of the mission statement, but it has been difficult for the Avery to strengthen its community outreach because it lacks leadership as well as financial and human resources. This will be discussed in depth in Chapters Four through Eight.

Assumptions and Limitations

As a native South Korean who had only lived in the United States for six years when I did the on-site research in the summer of 2011, I may have been relatively free of biases about the Midwest. However, I acknowledge that I started the research with some preconceived notions about the Midwest from acquaintances and the mass media. I had the stereotypical impressions that there were nothing but cornfields in the Midwest and that Midwestern people lack passion and imagination.

I also assumed that museums in general are closely related to their surrounding population as well as to their cultural, economic, and educational environments and that all museums have unique qualities depending on their surroundings. Therefore, I theorized that museums need practices that are more creative, democratic, and informal rather than the one-size-fits-all approach to education and practices. Consequently, I had concluded that ideal museums are community-oriented, diverse, and inclusive of the general public regardless of their racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. I also believed that museums
should value the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes visitors bring to the culture of the museum, rather than try to impose their values on them.

By reading a great deal of literature on systems theory and ecological perspectives, which emphasize the connectedness of all natural species, human beings, and surrounding environments, I developed the notion of a museum as a social ecosystem, which is briefly introduced earlier in this chapter. Such a museum ecosystem can be understood within the context of its environments, visitors, and other related elements, which allowed me to see the Avery holistically. However, at the same time, this view has prevented me from seeing other possibilities that cannot be explained by using the theoretical concept of a museum as a social ecosystem because museums are human-created organizations rather than natural organisms that work to survive and reproduce. While I was collecting data, I put this concept (museum as social ecosystem) aside in order to gather descriptive and diverse data. When analyzing and interpreting this data, however, I replaced the concept with a similar but more organizationally oriented view of systems theory that sees organizations as open systems and cultural spaces, which will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

By accepting my assumptions, I am aware of the limitations of the study. First, I am a native South Korean woman whose cultural assumptions differ in many ways from Americans. This study is also limited by the duration of data collection, number of participants, and composition of the participants. I will discuss the details of methodology limitations in Chapter Three on methodology.

**Research Background Grounded in Personal Experience**

As a graduate student in Syracuse University’s Museum Studies program, I had the opportunity to visit many museums in the United States, from small, local museums to large
metropolitan ones. After two years of study (2006-2008), I came to understand that museums are not as democratic, communicative, and inclusive as I had believed. I discovered that most museum audiences were predominantly White except in museums that focused on certain ethnic arts, histories, or cultures (e.g., African American, Asian, and Jewish museums). I was sensitive to this tendency because I am a member of underrepresented groups in the United States. This tendency was less obvious in science museums, zoos, and botanical gardens, which I also observed, than in art museums. In addition, by working in many different museums, including the Everson Museum of Art, the Erie Canal Museum, the Syracuse University Art Galleries, and the American Museum of Natural History, I observed that museum professionals were also largely homogeneous in their ethnic, cultural, and educational level and social background. Since I have not experienced every museum in the United States and cannot be free of biased, personal assumptions, it would be unfair to claim that this tendency holds across all museums. However, a study of relevant literature confirmed these troubling observations, and I concluded that museum staff and its audience population were socioeconomically, culturally, and educationally homogeneous. Since these first years in the United States, I have been motivated to learn more about the origins of this tendency and how we, as museum professionals, scholars, and students, can make museums more active, inviting, relevant, and inclusive of as many people as possible. I speculated that museums need more diverse connections in their practices at various levels.

While diversity could be defined narrowly as race or ethnicity, in this study, the concept of diversity includes socioeconomic differences, educational background, learning styles, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic backgrounds, religion, and other differentiating aspects that influence identity and culture. Diversity is a concept that helps people be aware of differences and relationships that can be left unnoticed in our daily lives. According to the American
Association of Museums (2002), also known as the AAM, diversity includes ideas of "national origin, gender, race, culture, economic status, religion, sexual orientation, physical or cognitive ability, age, and/or family structure" (para. 1). The AAM (2002) emphasizes three areas that need more diversity in museum practices: 1) museum services—fostering diversity through programs, services, and facilities that are inviting and relevant to surrounding communities; 2) staff composition and management styles—practicing diversity through recruiting, retaining, and valuing diverse, committed staff and leadership and using responsible and smart business practices; and 3) inclusive museum practice as a whole—promoting diversity to ensure museums address the needs and interests of the public.

AAM’s diversity initiative emphasizes the inclusiveness and relevance of museum practices to their community members. Museum practices, staff composition, the culture of the community, and other surrounding environments are all connected and interdependent. I started to question whether not seeing these relationships holistically may have resulted in homogeneous professional and museum visitor composition. For example, when museum staff members do not know what community members would like to experience at the museum and do not reflect visitor feedback in their practice, the museum is not likely to attract new audiences. If museum staff members are not diverse in terms of race, culture, socio-economic background, and education experience, they are more likely to focus on exhibitions and programs that they feel important, interesting, and comfortable. In this case, some people who do not understand what the museum currently offers may feel disconnected from the museum. This suspicion led me to conduct this study, investigating relationships among the museum, community, and other related elements.
Intellectual Significance to the Field

In this section, I discuss the significance of the study to the field of museum studies and art education. The main concern of the research is in the field of museum education and management, primary elements of museum studies. However, broadly speaking, education in the visual arts in museums is part of art education overall because art education is not limited to kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) public school education but also includes informal art education at arts, cultural, and other community-based institutions. Therefore, this study informs the field of art education in general. Its significance is discussed in four ways: 1) the significance of educational organizations as learning communities, 2) the importance of a holistic view of museums and their communities, 3) the value of museums becoming more active and relevant organizations in the community, and 4) the significance of diversity practices in art museums.

First, as described early in this chapter, my theoretical framework presents educational organizations, such as schools, universities, and museums, as open systems and cultural places where people work together to create institutional cultures of their organizations. An ideal educational organization would function like a learning community that is continuously growing and learning together in order to be a more effective and relevant organization to all involved people (Senge, 2006). A learning organization is messy, complex, and not perfect, but it always grows to be something better than the current state (Senge, 2006). This view of a learning organization could act as a mind-set or theoretical perspective for museum professionals and teachers to see their practices critically and work and learn together to improve their current practices.

Second, the study is significant because it emphasizes the importance of interconnections in museum practices: relationships between the museum and its community as well as
connections among museum structure, the culture of work and employment, the local population, and other environments. Many museum scholars argue that because museums are part of society, they are responsible to be inclusive, diverse, and conscious of the needs and interests of the surrounding communities (Falk, 2009; Hirzy, 1992; Janes, 2009; Sandell, 2007; Silverman, 2010). While this view has been valued in the field of museum scholarship, few studies have examined the important relationships among museum elements using ethnography: museum staff, visitors, community members, other cultural and educational institutions with similar functions, and more in order to draw a holistic picture of a real world art museum. Thus, this study fills that gap in the literature of museum studies. The study also emphasizes how the organizational and managerial structure, work culture, communication system, and museum services depend on overall museum qualities and visitor satisfaction. For example, by examining the museum’s services, programs and exhibitions, and community perceptions of the museum, the study reveals why the museum tends to attract a certain group of people in the community while they do not attract others.

Third, the study examines effectiveness, challenges, and potential solutions for the art museum to become a more active, relevant, and responsive organization in the community. Because of funding and structural changes of museums in the 1970s and 1980s, museums had to diversify their roles and identities while they competed with other educational, arts, cultural, and entertainment institutions (AAM, 2011; Moore, 1994). Most scholars argue that museums need to more carefully monitor the needs and interests of their audiences because museums no longer rely on traditional sources of funding, such as government and federal funding. It is no longer the time for museums to wait for visitors and patrons to come to the museum. On the contrary, it is
the time to actively engage local audiences, potential donors, and patrons by inviting them to the museum.

Lastly, the study shows ways museums can be more diverse regarding museum services, staff composition, and roles and responsibilities. The importance of diversity in museum practices at various levels has been emphasized, but achieving it remains one of the most difficult challenges in the field of museums. According to the AAM (2002), museums in the United States do not embrace enough diversity in their practices, leaving “a significant disparity between the diversity of our communities and the people who visit, work in, and lead our cultural institutions” (para. 1). According to the most recent United States Census (2011) available, conducted in 2010 and reported in 2011, at least one-third of the American population is made up of racial minorities. In addition, the minority population in 2010 has increased compared with the 2000 United States Census. For instance, Hispanic or Latino and Asian populations increased by 43% and 43.3%, respectively. It is expected that this proportion will continue to grow, actually removing several groups from minority status. While racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is only a fraction of the whole concept of diversity discussed previously, it shows the tendency towards a flexible society that is continuously becoming more diverse. In addition, it is important to pay attention to different ways of learning and to marginalized types and genres of arts, such as indigenous epistemology, minority arts, and minority cultures, which are often not addressed in mainstream museum practice and education. Considering this reality, addressing and paying close attention to diversity in the community in museum education and practices deserves more serious attention than ever.
Target Audience and Goals of the Study

The Avery’s staff will be my first audience. They asked me to share my written project with them when it is complete. My descriptive study and suggestions could potentially be helpful if staff members feel that my study is valuable and decide to incorporate discussions and suggestions in their practice. Such innovations might shed light on museum practices that the staff were not aware of or may have neglected. When museum professionals are fully engaged in an organization for many years, working in the same department and doing similar tasks, they may not evaluate their work critically or may not see how a museum practice relates to other staff, departments, visitors, and the community. Reading a descriptive study of the museum’s practices and its relationship to the community conducted by an outsider may enable staff to see the entire museum functioning and its relationship to the community from a new or alternative perspective. In addition, by including diverse views from the staff, visitors, and community members in the study, museum staff members may explore different ways of accommodating the needs and interests of diverse community members.

While the study is not suitable for universal or statistical generalization, it can benefit museum directors, trustees, educators, curators, and other museum professionals in art museums. Since my case is an art museum, it is more relevant to art museum professionals than professionals in other kinds of museums. However, my target audience may not be limited to art museum professionals because there are many shared characteristics and challenges among other non-profit cultural and educational organizations such as educational mission, funding sources, and staff composition and background. As I discussed earlier, the study’s theoretical framework can be applied to public schools, which could benefit teachers and students. Schools could be seen as open systems that influence and are influenced by involved people and surrounding
communities and that continue to grow to be something better. School teachers could benefit from my study by learning about these complex relationships and making them stronger so that the school culture, larger educational system, teaching styles and content reflect the needs and interests of students and the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of the community.

Beyond its contribution to scholarship, the study aims to encourage art museum professionals to understand the connections between their museums and the communities they serve. My study examines how the relationship between the unique museum culture and its community influences overall museum practices, community perception, and visitor population, background, and pattern. Another important purpose of this study is to increase the dynamic connections to the community, its culture, and surroundings. Hopefully, museums will be able to reevaluate their practices, finding new ways to tackle the challenges of reaching out to diverse community members.

**Outline of the Dissertation**

The dissertation has eight chapters. In the first, I introduce my research questions and briefly introduce the case study, including my reasons for choosing the Avery as my research site. I also explain my assumptions and limitations, personal experience relevant to the study, the intellectual significance of the dissertation in the fields of art education and museum studies, its target audience, and the goals of the study. The second chapter includes a review of relevant literature in order to detail my theoretical framework, to distill the research by museum scholars and professionals on the topic, and to establish my position in the field. Chapter Three sets forth the methodology, theoretical approaches to the methodology, the design of the research as well as my experience in the field. I also include how I used relevant qualitative research literature on
methodology to design my own research, collect data in the field, and to organize, analyze, and interpret the data.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven are aspects of an intertwined story but are divided into four parts to simplify analysis and to explain to readers what I view to be the essential components of the holistic museum and community under investigation. Chapters Four and Five describe the River City community and the Avery Art Museum, respectively. Chapter Four includes the community’s unique social, demographic, economic, and educational culture while Chapter Five explains the organization of the museum and its staff. Next, Chapter Six examines the museum’s primary services, exhibitions and programs for visitors, and how community members in general perceive the Avery based on the museum’s physical spaces, services, culture, characteristics of the community, and other related aspects. Chapter Seven investigates the Avery’s work culture and how it affects the museum’s overall practices. Chapter Eight summarizes each chapter, presents conclusions, explains how the dissertation answers the research questions introduced in Chapter One, and, finally, discusses future research directions.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a brief history of art museum development in the United States and an explanation of how traditionally conceived art museums are different from other kinds of museums. It describes how the changing demands, interests, and needs of audiences have led many museums to become more interactive, participatory, and inclusive community-based social centers.

Next is a discussion of organization management. First, museums are different from and similar to non-profit and for-profit organizations and can be conceptualized as hybrid organizations that have mixed forms of funding, management styles, goals, and missions. Second, literature from the fields of museum, non-profit, and for-profit management is reviewed in an analysis of organizational structure and managerial theories, leadership theories and styles, and communication systems. Because of the limited literature available in museum management, I broadened my search to include non-profit and for-profit management, which are also relevant to museum management because museums can be considered businesses in that they have to meet financial goals and provide services.

The third section of this chapter discusses community development through diversity practices in museums using a number of real world examples. I focus on four aspects of museum diversity practices that help museums become active, relevant, and responsive organizations in the community: 1) curatorial and programming approaches, 2) exhibitions and programs, 3) staff composition, professional development, and recruitment, and 4) visitors. These four areas of diversity practices are inseparable because they inform one another. Last, this section introduces several examples of museums that have successfully incorporated diversity at various levels and can be considered models of community-based learning centers.
These three areas of literature review informed my theoretical framework for understanding the Avery and its community as well as analyzing and interpreting collected data. The discussion of art museum history in the United States leads to the discussion of how art museums became more involved with their communities and strive to be more active and relevant to the needs and interests of community members. This discussion sets the tone that I lean more toward museums that strive to serve the needs and interests of the community and to make strong relationships with many parts of their communities. The next section of literature review discusses different viewpoints on organization management, and I distill an overarching theoretical framework that views organizations as open, cultural systems that are changing and growing. Therefore, no two organizations can have the same institutional culture and can be managed in the same way. The third section investigates examples of real world museum diversity practices that foster diverse connections among museum staff members, visitors, and other community members. This literature review shaped how I see museums and informed what I consider as best museum practices.

**Brief History of United States Art Museum Development**

In the past, kings and princes collected art to affirm their power and wealth. Thus, collecting and appreciating art became a symbol of high social status. By the eighteenth century, an elite art world, limited to those few who were privy to elite culture, had become established in Europe (McClellan, 2003). “Admission to the art world required appropriate social standing but also a mastery of critical terms and history” (McClellan, 2003, p. 3). These notions of high culture and membership limited to those who had social, economic, and educational power, served as the foundation for most early art museums in European countries. The opening of the Louvre in Paris in 1793 and the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert
Museum) in London in 1857, along with a number of other museums in Europe, afforded the public with wider access to museums. However, most museum objects and artifacts were from royal and princely collections and were seen as symbols of national power, wealth, and stewardship (McClellan, 2003). Even though the lowest classes of society were allowed to visit the Louvre when it was opened to the public in the late 18th century, they were largely considered ignorant and unable to understand the high culture displayed in the royal palace (McClellan, 2003). Most museums established in the late 18th and early 19th century remained focused on royal collections, national treasures, and items confiscated from other countries. The intent was to emphasize national power and wealth rather than to provide a service to the general public.

Some early art museums in the United States were founded under the influence of both the South Kensington Museum and the Industrial Revolution and thus reflected an interest in art being connected to people’s daily lives. The attitudes and practices of later American museums, however, tended again to primarily address the interests and needs of upper-middle class people. For example, one early museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, was established in 1870 under the motto “Art, Industry, Education” (McClellan, 2003, p. 17). However, by the end of the 1800s, the museum’s rich, powerful patrons started to believe that the museum needed to provide arts and aesthetics rather than utilitarian artisanship (McClellan, 2003). DiMaggio (1991) even argues that the Museum of Fine Arts was founded intentionally to serve and educate upper-middle class people and to preserve their high culture.

People who understand high culture tend to have more background in art and art history, be better educated, and have more experience going to cultural institutions as a child (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, they have cultural capital. Cultural capital is associated with social and
cultural knowledge that grants social power and status (Bourdieu, 1984). Through guarding cultural capital in museums like the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, elite people kept cultural and artistic knowledge out of reach of most people who were not members of their exclusive social club, which created a deep gap between high and popular art and culture. The museum limited some community members from being exposed to opportunities to gain cultural capital.

The tendency to emphasize elite aesthetic instruction continued to affect the practices of United States art museums and professional development in those museums. For example, the first museum course at Harvard University, developed by Paul Sachs and offered from the 1920s through the 1950s, indicated the following as essential qualifications for high-level museum staff: “a solid (preferably Ivy League) education and genteel background” (McClellan, 2003, p. 22). Alfred Barr, the first director of the MOMA, who was influenced by Sachs, believed that masterpieces did not require any explanation or interpretation but rather that they could speak for themselves. This view may have been based on the assumption that all people could inherently understand the value of fine arts or it could have implicitly excluded those who were not considered part of the high culture. In line with these views, Barr developed what Brian O’Doherty (1986) would later label the white-cube approach to displaying artwork in order to provide only the “necessary conditions for proper (visual, non-political) consumption of serious painting” (McClellan, 2003, p. 25).

O’Doherty (1986) discusses the concept of an art museum gallery as a white cube in his essays that first appeared in Artforum in the 1970s and were later published in the book, Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space. O’Doherty (1986) argues that the white wall and neutral interior provide an ideal space for a work of art to be seen because the white cube does not interrupt the aesthetic qualities of the work or allow the penetration of any outside
social or political context. However, the gallery space is inseparable from the artwork exhibited in it; it is an esthetic object itself that becomes part of the artwork, transforming the context of the gallery space into an aspect of the content of the artwork (O’Doherty, 1986).

Many art museums still cater to affluent members of the dominant culture, and the historical role of museums to collect, preserve, and research objects is still apparent (Fleming 2002; Janes, 2009; McClellan 2003). This focus on objects and a handful of people reflects a tendency towards elitism and concentration on academic research about the collections and art histories of Western cultures (McClellan, 2003). These qualities have excluded underrepresented groups of people from fully participating in museum exhibitions and activities and have prevented their stories from being heard in mainstream museums (Ames, 2006; Fleming, 2002; Marzio, 1991; McClellan, 2003; Tucker 1992).

Many visitors would prefer to have hands-on, participatory, interactive museum exhibitions and programs such as those that have been successfully adopted by a number of science, natural history, and children’s museums where visitors are invited to touch samples of objects, watch theme-related movies, and enjoy casual interactions with friends and family members (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). These museums tend to have more diverse audience members than traditionally conceived art museums where visitors often feel that they should be quiet and that the exhibitions and programs are didactic (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). While these museums are different from art museums in terms of mission, collection, and purpose, I suggest that art museums can adopt this participatory quality in programming such as lectures, tours, workshops, and art-making classes.
Museums as Relevant Social Organizations—Counter-Narrative

A significant counter-narrative to the standard story of the art museum as a white cube and repository for elitist culture recognizes the view that museums should be seen as more than depositories of important artifacts and artwork. There are indications that art museums are increasingly considered to be active public educational institutions where relationships and networks among people are located at the center of their mission and where visitors’ voices are heard and reflected in their practices. Theodore Lewis Low (1942) argues that museums are social instruments responsible for social harmony and that they should not continue to be seen as Euro-centric, object-oriented institutions for scholarship that is only relevant to a handful of people. Even before Low, John Cotton Dana (1917), former director of Newark Museum in New Jersey, discussed the critical role of museums as social and educational institutions. In his book, *The New Museum*, Dana (1917) states that museums should “learn what aid the community needs: fit the museum to those needs” (p. 38), caring more for the community than for the artifacts on display. *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* published by the AAM provides evidence of the shift in the role of museums towards acting as agents for social inclusion and as educational centers (Hirzy, 1992). This report emphasizes principles for achieving social inclusion, cultural diversity, and educational value along with implementation suggestions intended to “enrich and empower citizens from all backgrounds” (Hirzy 1992, p. 6). Marzio (1991), Sandell (1998), Weil (1999), and O’Neill (2002) also argue that museums are obliged to fulfill the role of social inclusion, cultural diversity, and community-based learning.
More recently, Janes (2009) and Lois H. Silverman (2010) assert that all museums are socially responsible institutions. In his publication, *Museums in a Troubled World*, Janes (2009) strongly argues that museums are inevitably part of our troubled world and have great potential to address and tackle social, economic, and environmental problems through effective and mindful practices. Similarly, Silverman (2010) maintains that the social work of museums is critical and should not be considered optional, especially since our society is presently so chaotic in terms of natural and human environments, education, and economics. In order to achieve more interactions and relevance among community members, Maxwell Anderson (2010), the chief executive director of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, even suggests considering new sets of mission statements. Traditionally, the mission of museums has been to *collect, preserve, and interpret*, but Anderson (2010) argues for a new trio of responsibilities: to *gather*, by including people, expertise, objects, and experiences; to *steward*, by managing and being protective of artists’ intentions; and to *converse*, by interacting with scholars, professionals, and community members. Furthermore, Weil (1999) observes that museums are transforming “from being about something to being for somebody” (p. 129). Nina Simon, who wrote *The Participatory Museum* (2010), took Weil’s phrase even further. She said, in her keynote presentation at the 2011 Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums conference in Baltimore, that museums are transitioning “from being about something, to being for somebody, to being with someone,” emphasizing museums’ role to foster human relationships (Simon, 2011). In her book, Simon (2010) emphasizes the participatory, interactive, and engaging museum practices that enable community members to create and share personal knowledge and become integrated into museum practices and experiences.
Museums as New Community Centers

Several art museums have recognized that more and more museum-goers are looking for engaging, participatory museum experiences. This trend of museums moving toward the model of a community-oriented learning place is apparent in recently published articles from the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Wall Street Journal. In his Philadelphia Inquirer article, Edward Sozanski (2010) reports that many art museums have added facilities and activities that are not directly related to arts. For example, the James A. Michener Art Museum announced its plan to add a new art-free wing for such activities as concerts, lectures, and receptions (Sozanski, 2010). The Philadelphia Museum of Art holds Jazz Fridays while the Museum of Modern Art offers yoga classes (Sozanski, 2010). These events reflect the museums’ efforts to attract new audiences who are not regular museum-goers and might not be particularly interested in arts but who nevertheless enjoy spending time with friends and family in interesting community-based surroundings.

In her article “No More ‘Cathedrals of Culture,’” which appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Judith H. Dobrzynski (2010) recognizes the same trend: museums are no longer considered cultural cathedrals that collect, preserve, and exhibit the best art. Rather, the expression “cathedrals of culture” now reflects a negative sense of elitism (Dobrzynski, 2010, para. 4). Along the same lines, many young museum directors believe that future museum visitors will not be satisfied with just looking at art but will want to actively participate in and interact with it (Dobrzynski, 2010). Many embrace the new view that museums should be social places where people feel welcome to get together, exchange ideas, and create knowledge (Dobrzynski, 2010). Ann Philbin, the director of the Hammer Museum, part of the University of
California in Los Angeles, said to the *New York Times* that museums are no longer just about art but rather are “the new community centers” (Vogel, 2009, n.p.).

Efforts to reconceptualize art museums along these lines can also be found among museum conferences where issues, such as diversity and social inclusion, are becoming common themes. For example, in March, 2010, *From the Margins to the Core?*, a museum conference focused on diversity and equity, was held in London and was organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the University of Leicester’s School of Museum Studies. Another museum conference, *The International Conference on the Inclusive Museum*, has been organized every year since 2008 to encourage academic and practical research to improve museum practices in a democratic, communicative, and inviting manner.

Art museums have evolved over time to meet the changing needs and interests of the community. Art museums are increasingly becoming community-based learning sites, where people are invited to enjoy not only artistic and aesthetic experiences but also to participate in various social and learning activities that are not necessarily related to art history or aesthetic education. Therefore, art museums in the 21st century have become multi-functioning institutions; they continue to preserve, display, and interpret important human histories, cultures, and arts but also strive to create new public knowledge through curation, programming, and research.

**From Public to Private—Changes in Funding Sources in Museums**

Museums’ ability to prioritize diversity issues, participatory and responsive practices, and community-based learning has been challenged by changes in the level of funding from the public sphere. According to a 2011 report from the AAM, government support (federal, state, local, or tribal) for museums’ annual operating budgets decreased from 39% in 1989 to 24% in
2008 while museums have doubled their private funding in the last two decades or so. Many museum professionals and scholars have various interpretations of the impact of reduced public funding on cultural diversity and social inclusion in museum practices. According to Richard Sandell (1998), the financial strain has resulted in museums placing greater emphasis on their role as agents of social inclusion. In order to compete for increasingly scarce public dollars, they have been forced to more clearly demonstrate their role and value to the wider society (Sandell, 1998). Weil (1999) agrees that the funding changes have led many museums to become less collection-oriented and more educationally focused. Resulting from a cutback of governmental funding to museums in the 1960s and 1970s, museums have relied on revenue from admission, shop sales, and other auxiliary events (Weil, 1999). Therefore, they have tailored their services to make them more attractive to the public. In other words, museums have shifted from a selling mode to a marketing one, meaning that they are working to satisfy the public’s needs and interests (Weil, 1999).

While Sandell and Weil see the reduction of government funding as an opportunity for museums to cater to more diverse audiences, Peter C. Marzio (1991) suggests that a more fine-tuned analysis would suggest an opposing result. He argues that the reduction of federal funding for art museums has caused museums to become commercial and profit-oriented in ways that discourage diverse participation. Exhibiting minority arts, for example, may be seen as a risky practice because such exhibitions may not attract as many paying customers (Marzio, 1991). Instead, museums are mounting exhibitions based on predictions about what will be popular among those who are willing and able to pay (Marzio, 1991). In addition, because of reduced public funding and the legacy of art
museums as part of a privileged domain, museums have paid more attention to the needs
and interests of their private donors than to those of the general public (McClellan, 2003).

Although authors have differing views on how a lack of federal funding has influenced
diversity practices, social inclusion, and community-based learning in museums, what is clear is
that the trend towards museum privatization has forced museums to go into the marketplace and
emphasize management (Moore, 1994). In agreement with Sandell and Weil, Moore (1994)
states that “a more community-oriented and relevant role for museums will be a safeguard to
their survival, not a burden to carry and respond to” (Moore, 1994, p. 2). Because of these
changes in the field of museums, it is clear that museums as organizations have to be managed in
order to achieve goals and missions and have to be more active, relevant, and inviting places for
the community.

Discussion of Organization Management

In this section, I review literature on museum and organization management,
emphasizing organizational structure, leadership, and communication systems. While these three
important aspects of organization management are divided into different sections for the
convenience of review, analysis, and reader understanding, they are inseparable. Because of this,
there will be overlapping concepts in the three sections. For example, scientific, humanistic, and
contingency theories will be used to discuss organizational structure, leadership, and
communication.

Since there is not much literature available in the field of museum management
specifically (Moore, 1994), this review includes relevant literature from the fields of non-profit
and for-profit organization management. Because most museums are non-profit organizations,
useful insights can be found in the non-profit organization management literature. On the other
hand, while financial gain is not the main goal of art museums, without profits, they cannot provide adequate services or fulfill their missions. Therefore, for-profit management techniques can also be useful in museum management. In the next section, I explain how the museum sector is similar to and different from the non-profit and for-profit sectors. In doing so, I identify museums as unique hybrid organizations that can benefit from thoughtful adoption of various organizational and managerial theories and models.

**Museums as Hybrid Organizations**

Most arts and cultural organizations in the United States are non-profit organizations. Some are private or public while others have a combined funding, governing, and management structure. According to the *Data Report from the 1989 National Museum Survey* published by the AAM (1992), about 40% of all United States museums (historical, art or otherwise) are considered public, meaning they are governed by authorities located in the public sector, while about 60% are privately owned and governed. In addition, among United States art museums in particular, 68.6% are privately owned. According to J. Mark Schuster (1998), however, many museums follow mixed forms of management and operational systems, which he calls “hybridization” (p. 128). For example, a museum can have a private, non-profit organization as a governing entity while drawing some funding from municipal, state, or national government. For instance, the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina, is governed by a non-profit organization, which also owns the building and the museum’s collection. However, the city pays all staff salaries except that of the director of development (Schuster, 1998). Likewise, the Avery is a private, non-profit organization but a third of its budget comes from the City of Watertown.

W. Mark Sukel (1978) explains that arts and cultural organizations are in a “third” sector that cannot comfortably be categorized as either public or private. Even if a museum is primarily
a private organization, it is often financially supported by public gifts, bequests, donations, and
government grants (Sukel, 1978). Most museums are non-profit organizations, but they generate
revenue through admission sales, museum shops, cafeterias, and other rental services. Therefore,
they also carry characteristics of the for-profit sector. Like for-profit organizations, arts and
cultural organizations are “goal seeking, hierarchically structured, and require managing” (Sukel,
1978, p. 349). Museums offer exhibitions and programs, which are comparable to the products
and services provided by for-profit organizations. Leadership, effective decision-making,
budgeting, personnel management, and bookkeeping are important aspects of both for-profit and
third-sector organizations (Sukel, 1978). Therefore, it is difficult to categorize museums neatly
as private, public, non-profit, or for-profit.

Arts and cultural organizations are different from for-profit organizations in that they
have more abstruse goals and missions (Sukel, 1978). While business value is largely measurable
by profit numbers, the value of arts and cultural organizations cannot be quantitatively measured
in the same manner (Sukel, 1978). In fact, in the third sector, especially in museums, profitability
can be better interpreted qualitatively in terms of achievements such as effective education or
active participation in the community. Quantitative measurements are less relevant. Goal
specification and achievement assessment are more complicated in the third sector than in the
profit sector because arts and cultural organizations have multiple goals and because they tend to
change more frequently than in for-profit organizations (Sukel, 1978). In addition, many non-
profit organizations, including museums, rely more heavily on human relationships, knowledge,
and skills than those in the for-profit sector (Bowsher, 1999; Moore, 1994). Therefore, straight
up business management principles and philosophies might not be suitable for third-sector
organizations, such as museums. Below, I review literature related to for-profit management,
museum management, leadership, and communication with these differences and similarities in mind.

Organizational and Managerial Theories

Historically museum professionals have not been interested in management, and some did not even think that museums needed to be managed (Moore, 1994). Because of the negative connotations of the word manage such as coping and dealing, museum discourse has tended to prefer the word administer as opposed to manage (Moore, 1994). According to Management Study Guide (n.d.), the term “administration” tends to be used for non-business concerns, such as schools, hospitals, and museums while “management” is used for the for-profit business sector. Administration refers to functions like formulating broad objectives, plans, and policies whereas management is a set of skills of getting things done on daily basis (Management Study Guide, n.d.). In addition to variations in terminology, there has been wider, international distrust of the application of business management theory in the museum context (Moore, 1994, p. 2). Due to the hesitation to apply business principles to museums, intellectual discussion regarding issues of museum management, organization, and leadership theories has been inadequate (Moore, 1994).

However, as I discussed above, changes in the financial composition of museum funding from public to more private sources in the late 1900s in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the world, have led museums to become more aware of the market and management effectiveness (Moore, 1994). Although applying ready-made business management models and theoretical perspectives to museum management would be inappropriate, Charles Handy’s (1993) book, Understanding Organization, and Tom Peter and Robert Waterman’s (1982) “Mckinsey 7-S Framework” explained in In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies have provided invaluable perspectives for the improvement of
museum management (Moore, 1994). In addition, Carol Bowsher (1999) discusses a systematically planned teamwork approach in the museum sector in her book chapter, “Total Quality Management in Museums: An Investigation into the Adaptive Relevance of TQM in the Museums Sector.” I will discuss Handy, Peter and Waterman, and Bowsher’s work in more detail in the section below, which focuses on human relations approaches.

Organizational and managerial theories can be divided into two distinctive schools: 1) scientific, bureaucratic, or mechanical management, and 2) the human relations or organic approaches (Marsden et al., 1994). Burns and Stalker (1961) use the terms *mechanistic* and *organic* to identify these two distinctive types of organizational structures.

**Scientific management approaches.** The dominant management theories in the mid-1900s in museum management were taken from the scientific approach and did not pay sufficient attention to people and relationships among the elements of museum organizations (Moore, 1994). According to Janes (2009), museums have generally adopted a hierarchical business model with a lone director in charge of major decision-making. This type of museum practice often destroys the link afforded by genuine conversations; it also prevents feedback and diverse perspectives from being reflected in museum practices (Janes, 2009). According to Low (1942), the traditional museum structural style divides museum roles into several different departments and locates curatorial and registration departments at the top of the museum hierarchy. Under this sort of traditional system, objects tended to be valued more highly than the general public (Low, 1942).

Frederick Winslow Taylor first theorized scientific management in the late 1800s and early 1900s as described in his text, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). Taylor’s (1911) approach emphasizes the maximization of labor productivity and profits believing that
this would lead to “the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employé [sic]” (p. 1). Taylor’s (1911) four scientific management principles are: replace rule-of-thumb methods with a scientific method of determining the most efficient ways to divide labor and perform specific tasks; scientifically select and train, teach, and develop workers; monitor worker performance through instructions and supervision to make sure everything is done in accordance with the developed scientific principles; and efficiently divide work and responsibility between managers and workers so that the managers’ time can be spent on scientific planning and training. While Taylor’s approach is still influential in the field of managerial and organization theories, it is criticized for treating workers as machines and for dehumanizing work places (Moore, 1994).

Max Weber’s (1964) bureaucratic management approach is also considered a scientific management theory in that it emphasizes bureaucracy or a hierarchy of authority as a necessary part of an organization. Taylor and Weber’s theories neglect the importance of human relations in the success of organizations by viewing workers merely as parts of a larger organizational machine.

**Human relations approaches.** Fortunately, increasing numbers of museum professionals have recently started to embrace a softer management style, the human relations approach. Museums rely heavily on the experience and knowledge of highly skilled museum professionals, and how they interact and engage with all sections of the community can determine the success of their practices (Moore, 1994). Therefore, a human relations approach that emphasizes complex relationships among human beings within organizations and in relation to market environments is more apt for museums than the scientific management approach, which is broadly used in the manufacturing and engineering industries (Moore, 1994). *Understanding*
*Organizations* by Handy (1993) praises the human relations approach, touting the view that organizations are not machines but co-operative communities composed of entangled human relationships and surrounding environments. Handy (1993) emphasizes many factors that affect organizational effectiveness, including motivation to work, roles, identities, interactions of related people, leadership, power and influence, group working, and the cultures of organizations. By emphasizing human relations in the workplace, Handy (1993) argues that there is not a universal managerial and organizational model or theory that suits every organization. Rather, each organization is unique because organizations are composed of groups of people who co-create their own organizational culture in unpredictable ways. Therefore, in order to be most effective, management approaches must incorporate an understanding of the interconnectedness of relationships and the culture of their environments.

Another theory that values a humanistic approach is “McKinsey’s 7-S framework” developed by Peters and Waterman (1982). The framework is named after the consulting company, McKinsey and Company, where Peters and Waterman worked in the early 1980s. This management model identifies seven variables that affect the overall performance of an organization: structure (skeleton of organizational chart), strategy (plans to achieve goals), systems (routine processes and procedures), styles (working culture), staff (people), skills (capability of the staff as a whole), and shared values (significant meanings or guiding concepts) (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Strategy, structure, and system are considered the hard elements of an organization and the rest are considered the soft (Peters & Waterman, 1982). According to the model, these seven internal aspects of an organization are interdependent, meaning that changes in one variable inevitably influence the others (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Using the framework, Peters and Waterman (1982) examined 62 successful United States companies and found that the
success of an organization does not come from the scientific management approach or organizational structure but rather from an organizational approach that fosters more organic skills, such as the art of doing, strong human resources management, creative thinking, and an innovative approach to product development.

Total Quality Management (TQM), which was initially developed in the engineering industry, is a holistic and long-term management approach (Bowsher, 1999). Because TQM highly values the human aspects of an organization and posits that an organization is run by people not by a system, it can be considered one of the organic organizational and managerial theories. TQM emphasizes that every aspect of an organization’s culture and operation is paramount to the overall quality of the organization, including the product and customer satisfaction (Bowsher, 1999). The TQM approach relies on teamwork that emphasizes empowerment through employee involvement, efficiency, and communication (Bowsher, 1999). “It focuses on processes, believing that everyone has a critical part to play in the quality chain” (Bowsher, 1999, p. 236). TQM also values the hard aspect of management such as systems, tools, and teams, which are all based on soft aspects, such as commitment, communication, and culture among people working in the organization (Bowsher, 1999). Because TQM is often discussed in the commercial sector where organizations produce tangible products rather than intangible services such as those offered by museums, this approach should be applied to museums with careful attention to the differences between the commercial and non-commercial sectors.

**Contingency theories.** As discussed above, organizational theories are mainly divided into two approaches: mechanical and organic (Marsden et al., 1994). Below, I briefly discuss four approaches that fall under the category of organic organizational theories—organizations as
conflict-driven, technology-driven, open systems (systems theory), and the cultural theory approach. The term “contingency theories” may be a better way of categorizing these theories, which were mostly developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Contingency theorists believe that there is not a single best way of managing, organizing, and leading organizations (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Handy, 1993; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Mintzberg, 1979; Woodward, 1980). Rather, they hold that there are many contingent factors that influence organizations to choose different types of management. Those factors include origins and history, ownership and control, size, charter, technology, location, and dependence on other organizations (Pugh et al., 1969).

Philip Selznick (1949) sees organizations as conflict-driven because there are different goals and intentions in each part of an organization, such as different departments, groups, and individuals. In the 1960s, Joan Woodward (1980) and Burns and Stalker (1961) pointed out that the technology a company uses can shape the type of organizational model that the company can use. For example, heavily machine-operated companies (e.g., simple manufacturing) can appropriately use a bureaucratic organizational structure while companies that use fast-changing technologies need a more flexible organizational approach. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) took this approach further by adding the environment (e.g., economic and market conditions). An organization with a stable environment is better suited for a bureaucratic organizational model whereas a company with a fast-changing environment needs a more organic, flexible managerial model to actively respond to frequent changes in the market and economic situations (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

Senge (2006) argues that organizations are like very complex open systems in that everything in the system affects everything else and everything is part of a larger environment. Therefore, each organization has to be understood as a whole. Senge (2006, p. 3) also points out
that most people tend to have this illusion that “the world is created of separate, unrelated forces.” This view is closely related to the systems theory as developed and articulated by the physicist and systems theorist, Fritjof Capra, and anthropologist and social scientist, Gregory Bateson. In developing his ideas, Capra draws on the earlier general systems theory established by the biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who envisioned a “general science of wholeness” rather than one which is isolated and fragmented and believed that living systems and things in the world are interconnected through a “wide range of phenomena, involving individual organisms and their parts, social systems, and ecosystems” (Capra, 1996, p. 46). Even though systems theory originates from the field of biological science, it can be applied to other fields, such as business, politics, and education because it views all organizations, objects, and living organisms as existing in networks of relationships (Capra, 1996). In the same vein, according to Bateson (2000), individuals, societies, and living organisms are understood as being situated in a context, constantly interacting with other parts of the world, and this view can be applied to human-created organizations, such as museums and schools (Bateson, 2000).

Senge (2006) sees this type of open organization as a learning organization as it evolves in relation to surrounding environments and people. According to Senge (2006), learning organizations are “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3). Senge (2006) emphasizes five disciplines that can lead an organization to an innovative and sustainable learning environment: 1) systematic thinking (seeing the whole rather than each part), 2) personal mastery (an open and passionate attitude for life-long learning), 3) mental models (critically scrutinize negative assumptions about human behaviors and fostering openness), 4)
building shared vision (effective communication of collective vision), and 5) team learning (members can learn and grow more rapidly).

Lastly, the cultural approach views organizations as unique places that depend on their surroundings, history, goals, people, and different ways of doing things (Geertz, 1973; Handy, 1993; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The fields of sociology and anthropology, which emphasize the unique culture of each organization, influence this view (Handy, 1993). The premise of the cultural approach is that every organization has its own way of doing things, although this does not mean that it is the best way or the only way (Handy, 1993; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

Contingency theory also applies to museum management as there are so many different types of museums in the world. There is not only one way of organizing and managing museums. Museums are complex organizations that influence and are influenced by their surrounding environments, including their particular focus, mission and vision, history, location, size, community, and employee base. In addition, museums can adopt different forms of organizational structure that can be used in different situations. Museums have changed over time in order to meet the changing needs and interests of community members. In addition, the museum sector is becoming increasingly competitive and has been changing constantly over the last two decades or so (Bowsher, 1999; Janes, 1999; Moore; 1994). The demands for more interactive and responsive museum programs and exhibitions are higher than ever. Additionally, funding sources and economic situations for museums have changed drastically over the last two or three decades (see the first section of this chapter). As Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) argue, an organization with a fast-changing environment needs an organic and flexible organizational structure to keep up with changes in the market. Therefore, museums can benefit by becoming
more selective and flexible in applying available organizational and managerial theories and models that suit their unique situations and environments.

My study of the Avery posits that the museum is a complex, open system that is a unique cultural institution, influencing and being influenced by the various elements of the museum and its community. While I adopt the humanistic organizational and managerial approach in understanding the museum, I specifically focus on the systems and cultural theories of the organic management model. Through using ethnography, I unpack the culture and systems of the Avery in Chapters Four through Seven.

**Leadership Approaches**

Just as organizational and managerial theories have developed diverse, complicated views over time, there are various styles and theories of leadership. According to Handy (1993), leadership theorization can be divided into three schools: trait theories, style theories, and contingency theories.

**Trait theories.** Trait theories maintain that the leader is more important than the situation of the organization or the nature of decisions to be made (Handy, 1993). These theories suggest that excellent leadership is correlated most closely with excellent qualities of the leader. Organizational success depends on the careful selection of leaders with these traits (Handy, 1993). The traits include high intelligence, initiative, self-assurance, enthusiasm, and imagination (Handy, 1993). Trait theories have been criticized for favoring elite leaders who have inherited the required traits and for placing too much emphasis on the leader to the neglect of surrounding people and environments. The great man theory believes that the leader is born not made (Starratt, 1993), and charismatic leadership theory (Weber, 1947) sees the leader as someone who has extraordinary insights and personal qualities that other people gravitate towards. These
two theories fall under the school of trait theories because they focus heavily on the individual leader and exceptional innate traits.

**Style theories.** Style theories are based on the belief that there are some leadership styles that work more effectively than others (Handy, 1993). The two ends of the spectrum in this school are the authoritarian and democratic styles (Handy, 1993). In the extreme authoritarian leadership style, the power of decision-making and control stays with the leader while in democratic and supportive leadership style, powers and responsibilities are shared and distributed among a group of people who work together (Handy, 1993). For example, Kurt Lewin et al.’s (1939) three leadership styles are: autocratic, participative, and delegative leadership. Autocratic leaders have the control and power to make final decisions and to separate themselves from followers while participative leaders make decisions based on consensus among group members (Lewin et al., 1939). Delegative leaders offer little or no guidance in decision-making and let group members make final decisions, which is considered the least efficient leadership model among the three styles introduced by Lewin et al. (1939).

Douglas McGregor’s (1960) Theory Y is based on managers’ sincere trust in their subordinates. Leadership style based on Theory Y is considered a democratic leadership style. In this theory, managers believe their subordinates like to work, accept responsibilities, and exercise self-control (McGregor, 1960). Therefore, in Theory Y, managers communicate openly with their subordinates, foster horizontal relationships with them, and include them in the decision-making process (McGregor, 1960). Theory Y influenced today’s servant leadership theory (Frisch, 2012), which was developed by Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) and emphasizes the importance of a supportive style of management that leads to a participatory working culture with a higher degree of contentment and greater involvement among workers. While some style
Theories incorporate an understanding of the importance of other interrelated aspects of leadership within and outside organizations, most style theories do not adequately account for the role of variables such as situations, the nature of the decisions to be made, and involvement of workers, in organizational success. Contingency theories explain these interrelationships more comprehensively.

**Contingency approaches.** Contingency approaches are characterized by the assumption that there is no single leadership style that suits all types of organizations because leadership depends on the individual in charge, the kinds of decisions to be made, the working styles and personalities of employees, and aspects of the surrounding environments (Handy, 1993). Even the same leader can adopt different types of decision-making styles or choose different types of managerial and organizational approaches for different tasks and decision-making processes (Fiedler, 1967; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). The contingency approach to leadership implies that leadership is something that can be developed, built, or coordinated rather than controlled, born, or fixed (Moore, 1994).

Vroom and Yetton (1973) argue that there should not be sharp distinctions among different types of leadership because delineating the styles in this fashion is likely to result in the benefits of each leadership style being discarded without critical judgment. Rather, they argue that everybody has a natural preference for making decisions based on situations, which is somewhere between the two dichotomous leadership styles of autocratic and democratic (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). “Good managers vary the way they make decisions based on the nature of the decision to be made” (Frisch, 2012, p. 35). For example, a leader may use the autocratic leadership style on a daily basis to make decisions that are considered trivial or require immediate attention while the same leader may use the democratic style to discuss important but
ambiguous issues, making final decisions after receiving input from all members of the organization. If the issue calls for brainstorming, the delegative leadership style can be used.

According to contingency leadership theories, flexibility in leadership is required for successful management. In museum management, no two situations are ever the same when the personalities of leaders, the work culture of staff, the market, mission, and community are taken into account (Fleming, 1999). Therefore, contingency theories provide a suitable framework for museum leadership.

**Leadership that leads.** The discussion of leadership has taken an approach that involves more than management (Handy, 1993). In other words, leadership is about leading people not managing them. According to the study based on interviews with 90 leaders conducted by Warren Bennis and Bert Nanus (1985), leaders are more concerned with the direction and vision of the organizations rather than the nuts and bolts of daily management. Through a number of interviews, Bennis and Nanus (1985) distilled four themes of necessary qualities that successful leaders need: vision, communication skills, trust, and self-knowledge. Leaders should be able to envision where an organization is heading, and this vision has to be communicated with staff members. Mutual trust, consistency, and integrity will provide a team of people with the feeling that the vision will come true. Lastly, leaders should know their strengths and weaknesses so they can build on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses by collaborating with people who are complementary. A leader:

is someone who is able to develop and communicate a vision which gives meaning to the work of others. It is a task too important to be left only to those at the top of organizations. Leaders are needed at all levels and in all situations . . . . We are all leaders at one time or another. (Handy, 1993, p. 117)
Leadership in museums. Traditionally, museums and non-profit organizations have adopted authoritarian and hierarchical styles of leadership (Janes, 2009; Setterberg & Schulman, 1985). Handy (1993) says that most people recognize that hierarchies are inevitable in all organizations. Top-down management styles have advantages, such as a fast decision-making process and a highly specialized workforce (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985). However, the trend in museum leadership is to move from authoritarian leadership styles to open, participatory, and consultative styles (Moore, 1994). Janes (1999) argues that the collective leadership model that has a group of leaders rather than having a lone director at the top of the hierarchy can be a useful model for museums and can extend the opportunity and responsibility for collective leadership to all staff members, emphasizing an open and participatory leadership approach. Collective management structure promotes mutual accountability, consensus decision-making, and rotating roles (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985). Janes (1999), the former director of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Canada, adopted this approach for leading the museum through organizational changes due to reduced government funding in the early 1990s. For example, he used a self-managed team approach and allowed staff members to choose team leaders who rotated every two years in order to keep staff fresh and reduce the sense of hierarchy within each team (Janes, 1999). The previously adopted top-heavy management approach of the Glenbow was not flexible enough to endure rapid organizational changes in relation to society and other factors. The museum needed something that was more flexible and creative as well as new ways of thinking and acting that helped the museum to be more active, relevant, and responsive to the community. Leaders cannot do everything by themselves, and they necessarily need help; “the best place to start looking for it [help] is with your own staff” (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985, p. 38).
Fleming (1999), the executive director of the National Museums Liverpool, also argues that there has been a shift in museum leadership that favors democratic qualities, emphasizing communication and teamwork. Fleming (1999) discusses several characteristics of good leaders: vision, genuine passion to lead, honesty/trust, integrity, enthusiasm, and charisma. Among many characteristics, he argues that good leaders should have a clear vision and communicate it well with the rest of the staff members; this sentiment is shared by Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Handy (1993). Fleming (1999) also argues that successful leaders know how to thrive on teamwork. Museum staff members can better follow the vision and embody it in their practices if they are influential to that vision from the outset through teamwork. People are more likely to commit to plans and goals that they help create (Handy, 1993; Setterberg & Schulman, 1985).

Because museums are hybrid organizations that have qualities of non-profit and for-profit sectors and they are also educational institutions that serve the general public, museum leadership requires a balance between scholarship and management. Traditionally, museum directors were noted for their scholarship rather than leadership and management skills (Fleming, 1999). There has been more demand for the leadership and management aspect of museum directors as museums are coming to adopt more business and marketing strategies due to the reduction of governmental, public funding sources (Fleming, 1999). At the same time museums are unique social non-profit organizations that emphasize custodial and scholarly responsibilities. Therefore, museum leaders should be able to bridge two different worlds: scholarship and the management of people and finances (Fleming, 1999). In addition, Fleming (1999) emphasizes the need for museum leaders who can involve more than elite traditional museum visitors such as new audiences and the general public. As museums become more complex and public funding
resources scarce, the traditional qualifications of museum directors being former curators or art historians will diversify to include leadership and management skills.

**Communication Systems**

As I discussed in the sections on the Organizational and Managerial Theories and Leadership Approaches, many scholars reference communication as an essential quality of successful management and leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bowsher, 1999; Farnell, 1984; Fleming, 1999; Handy, 1993; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Communication is the cornerstone of any type of organization because it enables all members of the organization to understand the collective goals and vision of the organization and to discuss plans to achieve the collective organizational purposes (Guetzkow, 1965; Peters & Waterman, 1982). According to Bohm (1996), communication means “to make something common . . . to convey information or knowledge from one person to another in as accurate a way as possible” (p. 2). In organizations, this function of communication is often used to give directions explaining how to perform a certain operation. However, this first meaning and function of communication cannot cover the more important aspect of communication that generates new ideas (Bohm, 1996). In dialogue:

when one person says something, the other person does not in general respond with exactly the same meaning as that seen by the first person. Rather, the meanings are only similar and not identical. Thus, when the second person replies, the first person sees a difference between what he meant to say and what the other person understood. On considering this difference, he may then be able to see something new, which is relevant both to his own views and to those of the other person. (Bohm, 1996, p. 2)

This process of dialogue is endless, and this is how people create something new together (Bohm, 1996). Based on Bohm’s discussion, communication serves as a system to flow
information, knowledge, and messages and as an endless network for creating new ideas. The latter function can be used in decision-making processes, problem solving, and brainstorming in organizations.

As communication is an essential part of organizational theories, communication theories have coevolved in accordance with changes and trends in organizational and managerial theories. The use and research direction of communication within organizations have shifted from a linear transmission approach to one that values a more social, interactive, participatory, and symbolic approach (Putnam & Boys, 2006), which follows the trend in organizational structure and leadership. In this section, I discuss communication theories in scientific and human relations. The humanistic approaches include systems thinking, cultural theory, and critical theory approaches.

**Mechanical communication approaches.** In scientific management and authoritative leadership theories, communication is somewhat uni-directional and linear as most decisions are made at the top and delivered to subordinate workers. Taylor (1911) argues organizational efficiency and maximum profit come from highly divided workforces specializing in one specific task; workers are told what to do based on predetermined scientific plans by their managers. In the same vein, Weber’s (1964) bureaucratic organizational approach suggests that communication is a managerial tool to command and control workers. These scientific approaches to organizational communication did not consider how interpersonal and informal communication affects the overall performance of organizations.

**Organic communication approaches.** The mechanical communication approach posits communication as a vertical act and theorizes workers as mechanical parts of an organization who only communicate facts; on the other hand, the human relations approach recognizes that
people are emotional, irrational, and have various qualities, which makes communication more complicated than what scientific organizational theorists have assumed (Roethlisberger, 1968). In human relations or organic management theories, communication is not a tool for commanding or controlling but for coordinating plans, increasing morale, and expanding creative human resources (Handy, 1993; Peter & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 2006). The human relations communication approach also acknowledges that human rationality is bound by the information that they have and does not function as a rational machine (Simon, 1997). In this regard, effective communication is absolutely essential to organizations because the information that each person has can be shared, maximized, and synergized by many people who are involved with decision-making processes through active communication and dialogue (Simon, 1997). Therefore, communication is an essential aspect of achieving organizational purposes. Human resources approaches believe that the satisfaction of individual workers can positively influence the collective organizational goals. Therefore, communication in these theories emphasizes the creation of democratic and participatory working environments that foster horizontal communication systems and networks among all involved members (McGregor, 1960).

**Systems approach.** Systems theory, which I introduced in the Organizational and Managerial Theories section, also influences communication theories. In fact, in this theory, communication and organizational systems are not two separate ends of an organizational spectrum. “Communication became the act of transferring, processing, and storing subsystem or environmental information, and organizations became information processing systems” (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). In this theory, communication is understood as a complicated learning network that helps the organization flourish (Senge, 2006). Communication is considered a flexible, informal, multi-directional, and on-going activity (Senge, 2006).
Systems communication theory can be characterized as a dialogic style as discussed by Bohm (1996). Dialogue allows a free flow of information among people in multiple directions (Senge, 2006). Through team-based dialogue, all members of an organization can find diverse, creative ways to solve problems and make decisions, and they can avoid the very thought that caused any problems from the outset.

**Cultural approach.** More recently, communication theories were influenced by the cultural approach. The cultural approach assumes that an organization can be best understood when communicational systems and that work culture among members are carefully studied (Geertz, 1973; Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). In the cultural approach, ethnographic methods are often used to understand and describe communication culture and systems in relation to the organization’s work culture and surroundings (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, communication is an ongoing activity that creates and influences the work culture of an organization in this approach. According to Peters and Waterman (1982), an informal, intense, and intimate communicational system is the key to creating an ideal work culture for organizational sustainability and innovation.

**Critical theories.** Critical theories critique the scientific and traditional organizational communication approach as mere transmission of information and posit that traditional organizations are colonized and gendered spaces that privilege masculinity business model and power relations (Deetz, 1982; Weedon, 1987). In critical theories, organizations are political spaces where realities are conflicted and shaped by all involved members (Deetz, 2001). The critical theory approach values individual input in organizational communication and argues that a dialogue-oriented model should be used for communication rather than an information-oriented communication model that is solely designed to transmit information (Deetz, 1982). Therefore,
forums can be produced where “the conflicts can be reclaimed, openly discussed, and resolved with fairness and justice,” fostering great participation and reaching more open consensus (Deetz, 1982, p. 26).

As communication is considered important in any organization, communication plays an important role in fulfilling organizational mission and vision in museums. Museum staff members communicate among themselves but also communicate with their visitors and surrounding community members either in person, printed words, or three-dimensional objects (Farnell, 1984). Communicational effectiveness and quality among staff members and departments shape an organization’s external communication system with community members because the staff’s enthusiasm and creativity are expressed in their exhibitions and programs, written materials, and other practices (Farnell, 1984). While internal and external museum communication systems are inseparable, museums focus too much on external communication with their visitors (Farnell, 1984). Farnell (1984) argues that museums will benefit from paying more attention to internal communication systems among staff and departments, which will help improve communication with the community as well. My study examines both the internal and external communication systems of the Avery using the systems and cultural theory approaches, which are discussed in Chapter Seven.

**Community Development through Inclusive and Community-based Practices**

In this section, I review literature on how museums build their communities through diversity practices. In other words, this last section discusses how other museums have met the needs and interest of community members and broadened their audiences to include diverse groups from the surrounding communities. As I outlined in the beginning of this chapter, I focus on four aspects of museum diversity practices. First, I discuss curatorial and programming
approaches that are designed to foster diversity in museum practices. Second, I introduce
diversity-oriented exhibitions and programs that can help develop diverse community
connections. Third, I discuss how staff composition, development, and recruitment influence
museums’ diverse practices. Fourth, I share various approaches to diversify museums’ visitor
population. Lastly, I introduce examples of community-oriented museums that successfully
engage their diverse community members in the museum activities and experiences.

Curatorial and Programming Approaches

Traditionally, museums have focused on collections and exhibitions that are from
dominant Western cultures, which excluded underrepresented cultures, arts, and histories.
Furthermore, their practices are object-oriented rather than human-oriented. Influenced by more
humanistic and democratic museum organizational, managerial, and leadership approaches, there
has been a shift towards programming and curating that is more collaborative and participatory,
often based on collaboration through interdepartmental teams.

a curatorial process that focused on a Westernized paradigm that did not include cultures and arts
from other countries and cultures. Ames (2006) identifies two fundamental principles of Western
museums—1) collections are vital and should be the focus of museum work and 2) preserving
collections is morally good for the community. The traditional principles place a higher value on
collections than on community and have led museums to design processes that transfer
knowledge based on objects rather than create opportunities for visitors to construct knowledge
based on their personal interests (Ames, 2006). Therefore, museums have left out marginalized,
disadvantaged, and minority groups from their programs and exhibitions (Ames, 2006). Ames
(2006) argues that imposing Westernized museum principles on local communities without
sufficient consultation may neglect the voices of local people and culture. In order to avoid the dominance of Westernized museum principles, the Alaska Native Heritage Center invites its native community to be involved by including native cultural experts, artists, and crafts people at every stage of planning, designing, and implementing exhibitions (Ames, 2006).

While Ames’ main goal in curating is to incorporate the voices and diverse opinions of the local community, Christina Kreps (2003) argues that the curatorial process is a cultural process that involves object-, people-, and social-oriented perspectives. Since museum collections are intentionally chosen, preserved, researched, and exhibited, they do not have monolithic significance as suggested by their presentation in many Western museums (Kreps, 2003). Instead, the meaning of museum objects is closely related to the people who have used, created, and viewed them in a specific culture and society. Kreps argues that museums and museological work are part of larger sociocultural systems and, therefore, cannot be carried out without being influenced by the surrounding people, cultures, societies, and traditions (Kreps, 2003). She criticizes the object-based curatorial approach as decontextualized from culture, history, society, community, and people (Kreps, 2003). By introducing the “new museology” movement, Kreps (2003, p. 314) hopes to lead a major reorientation in museum curatorship to one that emphasizes democratization of museum education and practices. The new museological perspective sees curatorship as a social activity from a holistic point of view and visitors as participants and consultants of its practice.

Roger Hargreaves (1997) takes a research-oriented policy approach in developing exhibitions and programs to attract more diverse audiences into his museum, the National Portrait Gallery in London. His view is that research-informed written policy is essential to successful diversity outcomes. Written policy, he argues, leads to planning, planning leads to
programming, and programming leads to implementation (Hargreaves, 1997). In order to carry out his vision, Hargreaves and his team in London conducted careful research about the local community and examined existing research on audience diversification in other countries. Their findings led them to define their target audiences as people with disabilities, young people, and black and other ethnic minority people. They then developed a written policy stating that acquisitions and exhibitions should address the needs and interests of these specified groups. Appropriate programs were developed and implemented and evaluation procedures were put in place (Hargreaves, 1997). The gallery even provided successful special activities for groups of visitors with disabilities and tailored workshops and programs exclusively to them, such as sculpture workshops for blind and partially sighted people (Hargreaves, 1997). This policy-based approach enables museums to implement diversity on a museum-wide level, avoiding programs and exhibitions designed to foster diversity as a one-time activity.

Like Hargreaves, Marzio (1991) strives to find a more permanent curatorial approach that includes minority art as part of the norm. He argues that regular exposure to minority art and culture will challenge and alter biases ingrained in the minds of mainstream museum-goers and professionals. This view is shared by Marcia Tucker (1992, p. 9) who criticizes museum diversity programs that take a kind of “art-apartheid system, where programs are segregated into appropriate time slots” and treated as special. To illustrate his point, Marzio (1991) highlights the exhibition, *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, which was displayed along with other Western art exhibitions by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, rather than treated as special. Marzio (1991), who served as the director of the museum at the time, argues that although the exhibition was challenging to develop because collecting information about Hispanic art at the time was expensive and time-consuming, it was important
to do so as a way of incorporating minority art into a general, mainstream art museum. According to Marzio (1991), an efficient communication system, consultation, and collaboration with the Hispanic community in the city of Houston were major factors in the development of the successful exhibition. He mentions that even though the exhibition was small, it had a great impact on bringing the museum and the Hispanic community closer together (Marzio, 1991).

**Diversity-Oriented Exhibitions, Programs, and Projects**

Exhibitions and programs are the most visible and primary museum services known to visitors and community members. While most museums have permanent collections that are not easily changeable, many museums have taken different approaches to these major museum services through collaborative projects, experimentation, and creativity.

There have been many collaborative projects among educational and cultural institutions in real world museum practices. For example, beginning in 1998, many Chicago museums created a citywide endeavor program, Cultural Connections, to foster cultural understanding, the value of cultural differences, and community relationships by offering cross-cultural presentations and programs to diverse members of the Chicago community (Cabrera, 2006). Some museums have included community members as their full partners in their exhibition planning and creating content for exhibitions and programs. For instance, the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia, provides a community access gallery called *The Forum* to balance the voice of the museum by contributions from community members themselves (Szekeres, 2002). In this gallery, community groups present their own displays, stories, and experiences (Szekeres, 2002).

Another example of full participation of community members as partners in the planning exhibitions and programming is the exhibition, *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*, co-created by
the Glenbow Museum (in Calgary, Alberta, Canada) and First Nations People, whose collective culture and history were the main subject of the exhibition (Conaty & Carter, 2005). This exhibition was about the Blackfoot-speaking people, groups of First Nations People who share a common language and cultural practices; their perspectives, stories, and feedback were included from the beginning stage of the exhibition and program planning process (Conaty & Carter, 2005). Their primary means for communicating with each other was through face-to-face meetings and all staff members at various levels and positions as well as diverse community members were involved in the entire process. This collaboration resulted in satisfying exhibits and programs that were meaningful to First Nations People and extremely relevant to the museum’s mission to preserve culture and construct knowledge.

Helena Friman (2006) questions traditional museum practices and expands them through experimentation and creativity. Friman (2006), who has worked in the Stockholm City Museum in Sweden for many years, believes that the museum’s role is to act as a mirror to reflect community and local culture and as a mediator to encourage participation and engagement. She believes that the museum must be part of the city and spark discussion and excitement about changes in the city environment (Friman, 2006). Through her professional experience working in museums for years, she has come to believe that traditional museum practices like guided tours for school classes are not sufficient but rather that a museum should interact with the public in more creative ways, expanding the scope of the museum from a building to an entire city without walls (Friman, 2006).

In order to realize her vision, Friman launched a project, Stockholm Education, which specifically aimed at attracting the city street workers, such as police officers, bus drivers, street cleaners, and traffic wardens, who were not frequent visitors to the Stockholm City Museum.
She assumed that traditional museum practices failed to engage them and decided to reach out to them by novel means. She recruited the targeted audiences to participate in a study of the history and development of the city through exhibitions, paintings, and maps as well as field trips to historical places and exploration of the city. In the process, the city itself was used as a great educational resource tool to stimulate intellectual curiosity and build interactive partnership and a sense of belongingness among city workers (Friman, 2006). According to Friman (2006), the project not only enhanced visitors’ participation and engagement but also increased their confidence and engendered a new attitude about their role in the city. Stockholm Education as well as other exhibitions and programs introduced in this section rely on collaboration with other museums and other parts of the community, embracing the notion that museums need not be limited to their own buildings but can expand through partnerships and collaboration.

**Staff Composition, Professional Development, and Recruitment**

Many scholars have noted the tendency of museum staff to be homogeneous culturally, economically, and educationally. Trustees and senior level museum professionals are predominantly white, upper-middle class, and well educated (McClellan, 2003). According to Fleming (2002), traditionally curators and directors have maintained the privileged position of making important curatorial and programming decisions and because they often have homogeneous backgrounds, they failed to reject exclusionary practices. In addition, they often see their purpose as the “pursuit of academic excellence” and this “specialist” perspective makes them actually less able to communicate with lay audiences (Fleming, 2002, p. 214). Curators are hired and trained to care for the collections and academic research, while care for the public is left to educators and volunteers who are often low in the museum hierarchy (McClellan, 2003).
As a result, art museum audiences, programs and exhibitions, educational policies, and staff and board composition do not fairly represent the extremely diverse society of the United States (Tucker, 1992). For example, male European-Americans occupy most senior-level museum positions (Tucker, 1992). Even though the number of women directors has increased, it remains far below the numbers of males in high-level positions (Tucker, 1992). Tucker (1992) says that the only museum position consistently filled by people of color is the guard.

Martha Lufkin (2009) shares the concern about homogeneity among museum staff in her article “America is Changing—But Are its Art Museums?” She points out that the proportion of white senior officers in major United States art museums is higher than in other corporations, universities, and government offices. She goes on to explain that it is relatively more challenging to prioritize diversity in museum practices since the majority of those who support museums financially has not changed (Lufkin, 2009). However, considering the fact that United States demographics are changing rapidly and minority groups will make up the majority in a few decades, United States art museums must diversify their practices and staff in order to survive (Lufkin, 2009).

In the article Lufkin (2009) interviewed many art museum directors, including Johnnetta Cole, the director of the National Museum of African Art, and Arnold Lehman, the director of the Brooklyn Museum, who have identified this issue and tried to implement museum diversification in their practices and staff organization. Based on the interviews, Lufkin (2009) concludes that museums should change in order to meet the needs of a rapidly changing, diverse society, and that the sustainability of United States museums will, in fact, depend on it.

Although Weil (1999) acknowledges that problems with museum staff composition remain, he argues that the way museum staff are recruited and trained has improved. Weil’s
belief is that the ability of museum staff to effect social change is just as important as their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. According to Weil (1999), museums are increasingly seeking out staff members who can work effectively with community members to meet their needs and interests. Many museums offer staff training to develop the practical skills required to establish relationships and collaborate with other organizations and professionals, utilize a variety of means and resources, and use proper evaluation studies and audience research to verify outcomes of museum practices (Weil, 1999). Similarly, Fleming (2002) suggests that museums should emphasize collaborative teamwork and generate new audiences through creating new, creative exhibitions that focus on the interests of local communities.

Weil’s recruitment and training approach is well realized in the staff training programs of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The Museum utilized effective staff training programs during its five-year-long, museum-wide project “A Place for All People.” Since the project required involvement from almost all museum staff members—including those in accounting, curatorial, education, exhibition design, maintenance, public relations, preparations, publications and graphics, registrar’s office, director’s office, security, volunteers, and more—training sessions to locate everybody on the same page were a necessity (Schneider, 1998). Having identified a lack of interaction among staff members, the personnel director, Donna Fleming, had designed a series of workshops to improve productivity of work, awareness of visitor services and diversity, and collaboration and communication among staff members (Schneider, 1998). These frequent training sessions and interdepartmental meetings led staff members to realize the critical role of collaboration in project success and to incorporate many different perspectives (Schneider, 1998).
The recent trend of museums becoming more community-oriented, diverse, inclusive, and relevant challenges the notion that the role of curators is to distribute expert knowledge. For example, the director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Olga Viso, invites community members to curate exhibitions in collaboration with curators (Dobrzynski, 2010). Recognizing that some curators are not comfortable with the concept, Viso asserts that in today’s climate, they will need to learn how to share their knowledge and research differently using diverse approaches (Dobrzynski, 2010).

**Diversifying Museum Visitors**

Over the past few decades, many art museums and professionals have tried to build new audiences and to reach out to underrepresented groups of people. However, the majority of the visitors remain homogeneous. A number of researchers have documented that most museum-goers share the demographic profile of being well-educated and wealthy (Falk, 1998; Farrell and Medvedeva, 2010; Janes, 2009). According to John Falk (1998), most museum-goers are “better educated, more affluent, and hold better paying jobs than the average American” (p. 38). In addition, 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts by the National Endowment for the Arts (2009) shows that audiences for arts institutions remain older and more White than the overall population. David Fleming (2002) even argues that museums have excluded socio-economically less fortunate groups of people “not by accident but by design” (p. 213). In other words, museums have restricted themselves to meeting the needs and interests of educated, middle-class, economically powerful people. The fact that museums have been run by an elitist minority has also affected what they have collected, how they have been managed, and for whom they have tailored their programs (Fleming, 2002). It is suspected that the relationships between the museum and its community are not carefully discussed in traditional museums, which made them
relevant to only a handful of people from the community. The traditional art museum has narrowly focused on rich patrons and elitist visitors who already have the rich cultural capital necessary for understanding high culture or art.

Robert Coles’ (1992) story of a group of students visiting the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1981 illustrates how some minority people feel about art museums. There he observed that some children were not comfortable being in the museum even though the museum staff had told them that the museum belonged to them (Coles, 1992). In a subsequent conversation, some students revealed to him that they felt that the museum did not really welcome them. Rather, they felt that because they were black, the guards watched them carefully, expecting them to cause problems (Coles, 1992). An African American boy told Coles that if he goes to the museum, people will worry that he will try to steal their pictures (Coles, 1992). The boy said to Coles that “I am sure of it! It’s their museum, not ours” (Coles, 1992, p. 8). The boy added later that “rich white folks” are the “bosses” of the museum (Coles, 1992, p.11). Coles (1992) believes that those on the top of the hierarchy hold certain assumptions and biases that are felt by the people who work there all the way down the line to the visitors. Coles’ story provides honest reactions from school children showing how they felt about the museum, why they did not want to return, and how invisible socio-economic division influences the way children think about themselves and their relationship to the museum world.

Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva (2010) conducted a study on changing future museum directions and suitable practices due to changes in US demographic composition and backgrounds. According to Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums published by the AAM, 34% of the total US population is considered part of a minority and 46% will be members of minority groups in 25 years (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). By 2050, non-Hispanic
Whites will be members of a minority for the first time since the country was established (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Farrell and Medvedeva (2010) go on to say that what are considered minority groups now, including African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, will become the “majority minority” (p. 9), making up more than 50% of the US population. They suggest that “the definition of ‘mainstream’ will have to be revised” (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, p. 9).

Despite the fact that United States society is becoming more diverse than ever, only 9% of the minority population is currently visiting museums (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Non-Hispanic Whites are still the predominant visitors of United State art museums, comprising 78.9% of visitors (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). According to Farrell and Medvedeva (2010), the percentage gap between White and non-White museum visitors has grown continuously since 1992. Based on this data, most United States museums are only useful to a small segment of the society, overlooking diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, education, social status, and age groups existing in this country.

Falk (1998) argues that there are many factors beyond simple demographic variables that significantly influence who visits museums and who does not. His framework includes demographic variables (e.g., age, education), along with psychographic variables (e.g., individual’s attitudes toward leisure and education), personal and cultural history variables (e.g., early childhood experiences), and environmental variables (e.g., advertising and word-of-mouth recommendations). Evaluated by psychographic variables, he argues that most museum-goers place a high value on lifelong learning for themselves and their families (Falk, 1998). They like to challenge, explore, and discover new things and think that going to museums is a valuable learning experience (Falk, 1998). Therefore, their primary purpose for visiting museums is to
learn, which is why frequent museum-goers have higher levels of education than non-frequent visitors (Falk, 1998). On the other hand, many feel that they do not have sufficient background knowledge or the “cultivated aesthetic taste (‘cultural capital’)” necessary to understand museum content and to be a part of the museum culture (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, p. 13). They also feel intimidated and excluded by “historically-grounded cultural barriers” while others do not feel that museum offerings are relevant to them (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, p. 13).

In addition, visitors’ personal and cultural history affects their tendency to visit museums. For example, if a child is taken to a museum by his or her parents, he or she is more likely to visit museums as an adult (Falk, 1998). As environmental factors, museum advertisements and word-of-mouth recommendations have a great impact on both first-time and frequent museum visitors (Falk, 1998). For instance, a person who has friends who visit museums regularly also tends to visit them often (Falk, 1998). Falk (1998) predicts that while museum-goers’ psychographic characteristics are unlikely to change, the number of people who value learning new things in their leisure time will increase. He adds that as America becomes more of a “learning society,” museums have great potential for playing a significant role in meeting the needs of those who want to learn new things as part of a process of lifelong education (Falk, 1998, p. 42).

Having established these tendencies, what kind of activities do non-frequent museum visitors look for in their leisure time and what kind of changes can museums make to bring these people in? In order to investigate such questions, Farrell and Medvedeva (2010) recruited three focus groups from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, educational levels, ages (but limited from 16 to 25), and museum-going experiences in order to listen to what they expect to experience and learn in museum settings. According to Farrell and Medvedeva (2010), the focus
group participants closely reflect the demographic composition of the United States in the near future. Through focus group discussions, the two researchers found that what the participants want from museum experiences is something “interactive, immersive, and participatory” (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, p. 23). Some focus group participants desire interactive, diverse, and relevant art museum exhibitions and programs, with more hands-on activities and options to choose from. Others would like to see their museum as a sort of lounge, “a place conducive to sitting and contemplating, talking and socializing, as well as learning” (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, p. 23). According to Farrell and Medvedeva (2010), most focus group participants do not select museums as their leisure destination, describing most museums as “static places (‘places that exhibit things’), didactic places (where the learning was not fun or engaging), and places where you have to be quiet and stand outside looking in” (p. 25).

While the focus groups may not completely represent future museum-goers’ desires, the discussion provides a rough idea of kinds of changes museums can make to become more broadly attractive. They need to evolve into more community-based, informal, and communicative learning places (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).

Silverman and O’Neill (2004) emphasize the importance of visitor studies that enable museums to understand complex patterns of museum visitors and find new ways to engage more diverse audiences. According to a session entitled Non-Visitor Studies: Researching the Needs and Experiences of New Audiences at the 2011 Visitor Studies Association Conference, held in Chicago, IL, from July 24 to 27, conducting a non-visitor study is critical for a museum in order to find out who is not coming to the museum and why, therefore, allowing it to attract members of the non-visitor population to the museum (Linett et al., 2011).
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, offers an example of how carefully executed visitor studies can help a museum understand and address its community’s interests and needs. The museum hired an audience research and program evaluation team, Decision Information Resources (DIR). DIR researchers conducted phone interviews with about 400 residents of each community in Houston to uncover the key barriers that kept people away from the museum. The most common barriers cited were the lack of awareness of exhibitions and programs, the sense that museum offerings were not relevant to potential visitors’ lives, lack of appropriate transportation, and a perceived inability to find a person to accompany potential visitors to the museum (Schneider, 1998). Some even thought that they needed to be dressed up to visit the museum (Schneider, 1998).

In response to these findings, the museum reinforced the role of public relations, experimenting with new outreach and communication programs. Local churches, schools, and other groups helped overcome the transportation barrier (Schneider, 1998). Museum educators altered programs and exhibitions to incorporate the perspectives of community members and encourage them to interpret works of art in ways relevant to their culture, arts, and daily life (Schneider, 1998). The key to removing these barriers was to let people know that they were welcome and that the museum offered programs and exhibitions that they could relate to. The museum hired a public relations company to attract diverse audiences and used local newspapers, national TV station, and local radio station to advertise exhibitions, programs, and events (Schneider, 1998). Through visitor studies, active outreach programs, and constant collaboration, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, succeeded in understanding what their community members want to experience from
museums and why certain groups do not visit it, critical first steps toward recruiting more diverse audiences.

**Community-based Museums**

A number of museums have already begun to address the needs described above and to develop their identity as community-based learning centers through innovative educational programs, exhibitions, and other inclusive projects. The Springville Museum of Art in Utah, for example, creates an intimate network that unites the museum and community members through community-based, family-oriented educational programs and special events (Gray & Graham, 2007). Community members work as volunteers to help organize programs, assist with exhibitions, workshops, and special events, and serve on the Board of Trustees (Gray & Graham, 2007). Many programs and workshops provided by the museum involve local universities, schools, and other cultural institutions.

The Springville Museum also provides a statewide network for Utah residents through the State Wide Arts Partnership (SWAP). The museum acts as the headquarters for the SWAP, which connects K-12 schools, art museums, and universities (Gray & Graham, 2007). Together all partners provide educational materials, such as posters, art packets, and integrated lesson plans on the subjects of art, social studies, language arts, math, and sciences, to schools and educational centers in Utah free of charge (Gray & Graham, 2007). Through this program, the museum shares the importance and value of culture, history, and arts of the community with teachers so that they can share their appreciation with students and their parents.

Gray and Graham (2007) argue that the Springville Museum of Art is closely tied to its community “like few other institutions in the country” (p. 309). The museum’s innovative programs and exhibitions connected to local culture and community provide unique
opportunities for members of the community to “come to know and cherish the place in which they live” (Gray & Graham, 2007, p. 309). A sense of belongingness among community members is created and the city’s identity is developed and cherished. As Springville mayor Fritz Boyer colorfully puts it, the museum is considered “our town’s living room” (Gray & Graham, 2007, p. 305).

Another example of a community-based museum is the Anacostia Community Museum, which was established as a Smithsonian institution in 1967 to specifically serve the African American population of the economically-depressed Anacostia area of the District of Columbia and to attract this historically underrepresented segment of the population to the mainstream Smithsonian museums on the Mall (James, 1996). The current mission of the museum is to serve as a community-based cultural center for the communities and residents of the D.C. area (Anacostia Community Museum, n.d.). The museum programs and exhibitions mainly feature histories, arts, cultures, stories, and experiences of local community members, families, and minority groups presented from the perspectives of community members themselves (Anacostia Community Museum, n.d.).

According to James’ (1996) analysis, engaging community members in museum culture and the museum in community culture does not require “bigger buildings and facilities, program auditoriums, exhibition spaces, and larger artifact repositories” (p. 44). Rather, it requires “the uncharted waters of relationships” (James, 1996, p. 44). James (1996) goes on to insist that success depends on building stronger bridges to connect museums, public institutions, and the community to each other.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which I mentioned earlier, shares characteristics of community-based learning centers. According to Marzio (1998), working with the local
communities is the most important role of the museum. In 1993, the museum seized the opportunity to engage more actively with community members from the most economically depressed areas of Houston through a five-year, museum-wide audience development project, “A Place for All People” funded in part by the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund (LWRDF) (Schneider, 1998).

The project focused on three Houston communities: the Third Ward, a predominantly African American Community; the East End, a largely Hispanic population; and the Near Northwest, a largely Anglo, ethnically mixed population (Schneider, 1998). According to zip-code surveys of museum visitors, residents in these three communities were identified as non-frequent museum visitors or non-visitors (Schneider, 1998). The goal of the project was to collaborate with existing cultural and educational institutions in each community, such as public schools, libraries, churches, parks, social service agencies, and other groups that already had a stake in the interests and needs of community members (Schneider, 1998).

A variety of community-based programs and exhibitions were created and developed through the collective efforts of museum staff members, local cultural and educational institutions, and members of the community (Schneider, 1998). The major focus of the programs was to interpret the museum’s existing works of art for the target communities and to transform existing programs, such as family days, outreach exhibitions, lectures, symposia, programs for senior adults, and others, into more community-centered ones (Schneider, 1998). The vision was for the entire museum to be genuinely oriented toward the community-building project. It was a vision that challenged and transformed the entire educational aspect of the museum (Schneider, 1998).
Through “A Place for All People,” the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, learned that building audiences requires much time and committed effort. The staff came to a new understanding that the museum’s collection embodies a variety of meanings that “include and go beyond art historical and the museum is committed to expanding the interpretation of the collection to reflect the ideas of teachers, students, children, art experts, and novices alike” (Schneider, 1998, p. 28). Although the funding for “A Place for All People” ended in 1998, the project goes on because, as the museum recognizes, the process of building communities does not have a beginning or end but must be embedded in museum practice continuously.

The Ak-Chin Community Ecomuseum, located on the northern edge of the Sonoran desert, 40 miles south of Phoenix, is another example of a community-based museum. The Ak-Chin people, a Native American group, have lived in this area for thousands of years (Stokrocki, 1996). They consider everything, including people, land, buildings, and farms, part of the large living museum. One of the main buildings in the museum area is the Him-Dak, a multi-purpose meeting area. The Him-Dak building was originally built “to store and restore tribal artifacts, serve as a library, house the tribal newspaper, hold tribal meetings, and socialize” (Stokrocki, 1996, p. 41). While the buildings in the museum area function as traditional museum buildings in terms of exhibitions, preservation, and research, the concept of the ecomuseum among Ak-Chin people is much broader. They see the entire land as an exhibition and use the Him-Dak building to “promote cultural identity, education, and dialogue between the generations of the Ak-Chin and with other tribes” (Stokrocki, 1996, p. 41).

In this sense, the Ak-Chin Community Ecomuseum is not a depository but a living organization involving nature, people, and other cultural and educational institutions. According to Stokrocki (1996), many artists reside in the area to enjoy the peacefulness, and local art
teachers visit the museum to find new perspectives for their teaching practice. Thus, the museum acts as a liaison among institutions and as a community gathering place (Stokrocki, 1996).

As this literature review reveals, the topics of cultural diversity and social inclusion in art museums are not new. However, I aim to approach them from a more holistic angle. In order to study the museum organization, its community, primary services, working culture, and communication system, I will rely on the conceptual framework of an organization as an open system and cultural place, investigating relationships among involved members and environments. There are a number of studies and articles featuring art museums as community-based environments. In addition, the literature views a museum as a complex, systematic, and cultural organization in relation to its diversity practices as part of the larger society while some of the museum literature fails to address complexity and inclusion. The focus of my study is to holistically understand the culture of the museum and community and to investigate the museum as an integral part of the community through the use of ethnography, which enables richer and more complex descriptions.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY—ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

This chapter includes an overview of ethnographic case study methodology and the details of the research design and methods. As part of ethnographic inquiry, this study adopts a naturalistic research approach and narrative writing style. Furthermore, this chapter presents a rationale for choosing the case study approach, in general, as well as my approach to data collection. I also continue my discussion of method development and the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, using the existing literature on ethnography and case study design in relation to my project. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of the methods.

**Ethnographic Case Study**

Ethnography serves as the primary methodology for this case study of the Avery Art Museum, although small-scale historical research about the institution is included as part of Chapters Four and Five when discussing the museum and community’s historical context. While my three-month study is considered short compared to traditional ethnographic studies, I adopted the methods that traditional ethnography often uses, such as interviews and participant observations, to study the culture of the Avery, with which I was not familiar.

Ethnographic methods are often used to study groups of people and organizations (Patton & Westby, 1992). As ethnography as qualitative methodology focuses on human behaviors and interactions, I use it to understand the culture of the museum in relation to its staff members and surrounding environments. My approach includes observing and understanding relationships among people as well as non-human aspects of the museum, such as the physical spaces, collection, mission and vision, programs, exhibitions, visitor interactions, and community’s perceptions to the museum.
Since the ethnographic research approach involves ongoing attempts to understand specific cultures, groups, individuals, events, and phenomena in a deep and meaningful way, aspects of it have been frequently combined with other qualitative research methodologies including case studies or phenomenology (Merriam, 2002). In order to achieve an in-depth understanding, ethnographic inquiries are usually limited to a few cases, a single setting, an organization, or a group of people (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This doctoral study utilized ethnographic methods to deeply examine the particular culture of one art museum within its building and community while surrounded by other cultural and educational institutions, commercial businesses, and community members. Because ethnography allows the kind of in-depth examination of interconnections among participants and related environments, it also supports the theoretical framework of the dissertation, seeing an organization as an open and cultural system that is dependent on the changes of all parts of the system.

**Ethnographic Inquiry**

Ethnographic research was originally developed by anthropologists as a way to study specific cultures and groups within their social, cultural, economic, and spatial context. In its original manifestation, it was often associated with the concept of *otherness*, and was generally used for locations and cultures located outside mainstream Western culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 2008). According to Barbara Tedlock (2000) and Paul Hammersley and Martyn Atkinson (2007), this relatively narrow view of ethnography has expanded to a broader notion of ethnography becoming a well-acknowledged research methodology in various fields such as cultural studies, literary theory, and even industrial engineering. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Harry F. Wolcott (2008) view ethnographic inquiry as including both first-hand empirical investigation as well as theoretical
interpretations of human cultures and organizations. Ethnography usually involves a researcher’s participation in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time and is associated with a variety of research methods in open-ended application (Davies, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

According to Wolcott (2008), however, ethnography is more than a methodology. While ethnographic methods such as participant observation (fieldwork), interviewing, and archival examination are broadly applied in many qualitative studies, Wolcott (2008) argues that this approach, borrowing ethnographic techniques, needs to be separated from doing ethnography. For Wolcott (2008), ethnographic researchers not only experience and enquire about cultures and human activities through participant observation and interviewing but also strive to understand and create meaning out of specific human cultures and activities. Therefore, ethnographic inquiries involve both “descriptive questions as to how, and understanding questions as to meanings imputed to action” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 74).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain that contemporary ethnography is often associated with constructivism and post-modern approaches, while it rejects the realist belief that a true reality can be presented in a linear and straightforward manner, with knowledge based on a secure foundation independent from human experience. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), ethnography also rejects positivism and pure naturalism. While the former is based on the premise that all physical phenomena can be examined and studied through controlled and standardized research methods and experiments, the latter presupposes that social cultures and relationships can be understood as they are, without the influence of researchers. Rather, ethnographers tend to view society as constructed, and they acknowledge that researchers necessarily influence the descriptions and conclusions of ethnographic studies by their
perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that we are necessarily part of the social phenomena we study, and therefore our investigations inevitably involve reflexivity, that is, our background, presuppositions, theories, and prior knowledge influence our research. Charlotte Aull Davies (2007) agrees with Hammersley and Atkinson’s arguments that “all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research” (p. 3).

My ethnographic research is very close to Hammersley and Atkinson’s approach to and Wolcott’s definition of ethnography. I used ethnographic methods to collect data, which could be borrowing ethnographic inquiries. However, my study did not end there. I used an ethnographic inquiry to do ethnography through striving to understand the culture of the museum, relationships among participants, and the meanings behind participants’ ideas, perspectives, and behaviors. As Hammersley and Atkinson discussed, I also freely acknowledge that my background, theories, and prior knowledge influenced how I used ethnographic methods, interacted with participants, collected and interpreted data, and composed this document. By participating in museum programs and volunteering for installation and programming execution, I intentionally became an active part of the subject that I was studying.

Naturalistic inquiry. Ethnography is closely related to a naturalistic inquiry, which posits that there are multiple constructed realities that can be studied in a holistic manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher cannot understand whole, multiple realities under investigation in isolation from their native context, and a phenomenon cannot be explained by looking at each part of the entire phenomenon. Therefore, a phenomenon “must be studied in its full-scale influence (force) field” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39).
In this regard, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the research setting but rather to observe “a naturally occurring event, program, clinical setting, community, relation, or interaction that has no predetermined course established by and for the researcher” (Patton & Westby, 1992, p. 5). I observed the natural museum setting as it is to understand connections and relationships without disturbing the existing systems, which allowed me to understand multiple realities of the museum within its context. This does not mean that my existence and perspectives did not influence how I interacted with participants and how the participants spoke and behaved around me. In other words, in naturalistic inquiry, “the inquirer and the ‘object’ of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37).

**Narrative writing approach.** Because ethnographic studies are associated with the multiple realities of subject, participants, and researcher, they often involve deep descriptions and a narrative writing style. Data processes and interactions with participants are influenced by the researcher’s perspectives, feelings, and experiences, and the final written product can come out as a narrative form of stories that include both perspectives of the researcher and the researched. I will provide a brief introduction to narrative inquiry and an explanation of how I adopted it in the following paragraphs.

What Polkinghorne (1995) calls *narrative analysis* is a research approach in which “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (p. 12). Thomas Barone (2007) prefers the term *narrative construction* because he views this type of research more as “an act of textual arrangement than of analysis” (p. 456). Narrative construction is often closely related to ethnographic studies as ethnographers started to include their field experiences in forms of narrative stories in their
studies along with the ethnographic memoir (Tedlock, 1991). According to Tedlock (1991), traditional ethnography has been often associated with the participant observation that requires a more distanced attitude on the part of the researcher toward the researched culture and subjects. However, in the beginning of the 1970s, the approach of participant observation has shifted to observation of participation that emphasizes more of the researcher’s experiences, reflections, and processes in fieldwork (Tedlock, 1991). A well-written narrative ethnographic study can include perspectives, representations, and experiences of both the self and others (Tedlock, 1991).

While narrative inquiry is used broadly outside of ethnographic studies and can be an independent research methodology itself in many different disciplines, I argue that my narrative approach is linked to the ethnographic inquiry I used for this study. As Tedlock (1991) discussed, my existence in the field provided me an opportunity to observe my participation in the field as well the participation of study informants. Although the narrative research and writing approach enable me to share both my perspectives and that of others, the stories told in the study inevitably have fictional qualities and issues of relativity. According to Geertz (1973), all ethnographic studies are fictions if one applies the original meaning of the word fictio as something made and fashioned. In my study, I use pseudonyms for all participants, museum, community, and other related entities. Therefore, it carries a fictional quality but not in a sense of fictions broadly known as fabricated and manipulated stories. Having said that, other researchers with different approaches and conceptual framework could tell a different story of the Avery and its community, which is further discussed in the Limitations of the Methodology section at the end of the chapter.
Case Study Inquiry

On the Case: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research by Anne Haas Dyson and Celia Genishi has been particularly useful to me in designing my case study. While most of the examples in the text focus on the field of linguistics, the authors’ detailed descriptions and examples of how ethnographic case studies can be done have been instructive. Dyson and Genishi (2005) use the word case as a verb to describe the process of creating a detailed research design, which incorporates careful consideration of the physical places that are meaningful to participants, the configuration of time that is relevant to the selected research site, and the people who interact with the space and schedule. Applying their definition, I cased the Avery Art Museum by studying the distribution of space, time, and people. The museum building, including gallery and lobby spaces and the outside look of the building, was carefully investigated in relation to visitor perceptions about the museum. Through observing the physical spaces of different sub-communities in River City, I describe characteristics of the community in my study. While the focus of the study was investigating the Avery’s current practices, its history and changes in the past were examined to understand how the past influenced today’s Avery. I also studied the culture of the Avery, including its management style and communication system that are created by people who work at the museum and informed by people who use the museum’s services.

While On the Case focuses on the ethnographic case study as a qualitative research methodology in language and literacy research, Robert Stake’s book The Art of Case Study Research is more focused on the ins and outs of case study research designs in general qualitative studies, which is not limited to ethnography. According to Stake (1995), case study research should not be associated with sampling research because one case cannot be assumed to
be representative of other similar cases. Rather, case study research is appropriate to use when
the focus is to understand a unique case within its grounded cultural and social context (Stake,
1995). Case studies directly deal with a unique, specific, and complex phenomenon.

Stake (1995) identifies three different types of case study research: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies. In an intrinsic case study, the researcher is not interested in understanding other cases through studying a single case but rather she desires to thoroughly learn about the one particular case because of its intrinsic research value (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study, on the other hand, involves a particular case that is “examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (Stake, 1994, p.237). For example, a case study, which focuses on a particular school, would be categorized as “instrumental” if the purpose of the inquiry was to understand the effects of a specific policy, which would likely be found in other schools affected by the policy as well. Therefore, an instrumental case study may provide a general understanding of a phenomenon through using a particular case. Lastly a collective case study may have both intrinsic and instrumental approaches as it involves multiple cases (Stake, 1995). This approach is also known as multiple-case studies.

I see my own research as an intrinsic case study. I am interested in knowing how the Avery functions as a premier art museum in River City within the community’s unique cultural, educational, and arts backgrounds, and how the museum can become an active, relevant part of the River City community. However, the study has instrumental qualities at the same time. While the Avery and its community are unique in many ways, it has similarities to other small- to medium-sized art museums in medium-sized Midwestern metropolitan cities. The Avery’s
effectiveness, challenges, and suggestions regarding being an active, relevant element of the River City community can be applied to similar art museums.

**Rationale for choosing the case study.** As I previously mentioned, this dissertation consists primarily of an in-depth case study of the Avery Art Museum. Before I explain the details of how the case study was executed, I will discuss why I chose to focus on one specific case. According to Robert K. Yin (2009, p. 18), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context.” Yin (2009) goes on to explain that the case study methodology is preferred and appropriate when how-and/or why-type research questions are raised, when an investigator has little or no control over events, and when activities of interest are contemporary and observable in a real-life context (Yin, 2009).

My research satisfies all of Yin’s criteria. First, my research questions aim to investigate how the museum is connected to the community and how relationships among its elements with the community affect the museum’s overall practice. Second, as a student-researcher and institutional outsider, I had no control over the case museum’s organization, governance, educational programs, exhibitions, or staff composition. Therefore, it was most appropriate for me to begin by investigating, exploring, and observing specific events. Lastly, my interest is not historical but focused on today’s museum practices. A case study affords an excellent opportunity to investigate the current phenomena occurring in a museum within its real-life context. While I include some historical information about the museum’s practice, the main focus is to understand and observe the current culture of the institution. An ethnographic case study offered the ideal means of investigating the questions that interest me.
Discussion of generalizability. Dyson and Genishi (2005) emphasize that even though case studies are grounded in specific physical spaces, time periods, and people, their findings can be generalized and applied to other similar settings within and even outside of the field of focus. They also point out that case studies are part of the social phenomena that researchers study and, therefore, can be treated as representative of the phenomenon (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). For example, the way in which one particular Cantonese-speaking child learns English grammar and vocabulary can predict, to a degree, how other Cantonese children will learn English. Thus, the study can be a valuable part of a larger academic and professional conversation and provide an alternative perspective to early linguistic development literature, which utilized different methods, such as quantitative assessments or surveys.

I understand that the generalization of qualitative case study research may not be acceptable since case studies deal with specific phenomena within unique contexts. I was even advised not to attempt a generalization from one case study. However, through reading On the Case, I have learned that case studies can be applicable to other situations within a specific content and background and, therefore, may be helpful for guiding other researchers who study similar phenomena. I realize that my research can be applicable to other educational and research settings and become part of the larger academic conversation. Readers can decide what aspects of this study are applicable to their unique situation, practice, or research.

Stake (1995) asserts that case studies are designed to study particularization, not generalization, although “petite generalization” can occur when a researcher develops and refines arguments and conclusions within the case study. Rather, case studies open up topics for readers to make various interpretations and naturalistic generalizations, which are “conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed
that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (Stake, 1995, p. 86). Therefore, researchers’ personal interpretations, personal descriptions, and narrative account and stories, which emphasize the time, space, and people of a case, actually help readers make naturalistic generalizations that matter to their personal lives and experiences. These constructed experiences also become the reader’s body of personal knowledge and modify existing generalizations. Therefore, generalization is up to the reader rather than the writer.

Yin agrees with Stake that case studies are not suitable for universal generalization, but a certain degree of generalization is allowed. Yin (2009) argues that case studies are not suitable for statistical generalization because selected cases are not sampling units, even if the study includes multiple cases. Rather, cases are selected because of their unique, experimental conditions. Yin (2009) argues that from this unique circumstance, case study researchers seek analytic generalizations. Analytic generalization is applied when a previously developed theory is applied and compared to later case studies (Yin, 2009). In other words, what can be generalized is the overarching analytic theory or approach, not the case itself.

My goal is to encourage readers to make naturalistic generalizations, but at the same time to enable other researchers to apply my analytic and research approach to future art education and museum studies.

**Approach to Data Collection and Research Design**

My primary approach to data collection was to establish a dynamic presence at the museum and to interact with people involved in the museum’s day-to-day practices. My interaction took various forms. I conducted informal/formal interviews, including in-depth, open-ended, and group interviews, straight observation, and informal conversation with almost all staff members in the museum, including the former director, interim directors, board members,
curators, educators, security staff, facility managers, docents, volunteers, lectures, artists, and visitors. I also interviewed and interacted with people in the community who are involved with museum activities. Some of them are artists, professors, teachers, and community leaders. The total duration of on-site research or data collection was three months, from May to August of 2011, and the total number of participants was 58. I rented a room at a house in Watertown, River City, where the museum is located, and went to the museum almost every day for observations and interviews, or I was out in the community meeting people and attending community meetings and arts and cultural activities. Further discussion of each data collection method follows in the Research Design section.

**Approach to Data Collection and Participants**

By taking an active member position as a researcher, I was involved with the museum’s variety of activities, such as meetings, programs, and special events within and outside the museum building. However, because I was not a full member of the museum staff, I was not allowed to be in the executive committee meetings. In addition, I was not able to speak with about two-thirds of the board members. Sometimes I felt that they ignored my emails asking to set up an interview. This created a boundary that I could not cross as an outside researcher. This would have been possible if I was taking a complete member position as one of the staff members, which was not an option for me. Despite these invisible boundaries, I intended to achieve a tone of being helpful, approachable, and professional at the museum. I was able to build trust among staff members. They were comfortable with me working at some of their events and talking to museum visitors. Some of them even asked me to join in some volunteer activities, which made me feel like I was part of the museum and community.
Because of my friendly, helpful tone of approach and involvement with the museum practices, most of the staff members were open with me in terms of sharing their perspectives and opinions about the museum’s practices and interactions among staff members, visitors, and other cultural organizations in the community. Some of them even anonymously shared about interpersonal communication issues that were considered controversial. In addition, by showing them my serious and sincere attitude toward the museum’s practices and doing research, I assured them that my study was valuable and done in a professional manner and the results would be as valid as possible. Overall, this informal approach allowed me to build a positive rapport with my participants, which resulted in their being more open to my research methodology and more willing to share their perspectives and ideas. Of course, some participants were more open with their views than others.

There were challenges as a stranger in a new place. The most difficult aspect of being a researcher in a completely new environment is to overcome the feeling that I did not belong to the community and the museum. I also found myself occasionally worrying about becoming a nuisance to staff members and visitors at the museum. Sometimes I found myself trying to make excuses for not attending a meeting. However, I forced myself to attend as many meetings as possible. It occurred to me that my occasional uncomfortable feelings may have reflected reasons why some people do not visit the Avery. I discuss more about this in Chapter Six.

**Research Design**

Data collection often starts from the beginning stage of the research design. Through searching for a research site, getting to know major contact people and participants, and doing preliminary research on the case, the researcher gathers data in a causal manner (Stake, 2005).
The most important and initial step to data gathering is to get permission from the participants and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for studying human subjects.

**Getting access.** Dyson and Genishi (2005) emphasize that it is very important to approach people at the desired case site in a friendly, yet systematic manner and to create a consent form that is easy to understand and avoids academic terminology (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In my case, I met my main contact person, Tina, at a museum conference during the summer of 2010. She is the director of the Museum Studies program at the Midwestern University that is affiliated with the Avery. After my presentation in which I outlined my research interests and dissertation plans, she and I had a chance to discuss possible research sites for my dissertation study. She recommended the Avery as a possible research site during the conversation. Inspired by her suggestion, I conducted preliminary research on the museum and discovered that staff members were striving to reach out to surrounding sub-communities and attract more non-museum-goers in the community to the museum. I explained why I chose the Avery as my research site in depth in Chapter One.

Knowing Tina facilitated my access to the museum because she was affiliated with the museum through her academic position. She asked the museum’s interim director at the time and other senior level staff members if I could study the museum for three months during the summer of 2011. Since I had previously known Tina through academic activities, the museum staff members were more open to my research and did not feel like they were having a complete stranger in their museum.

Because my study involves human participation and observation of human subjects, I was required to apply for and receive the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. To do this, I submitted an electronic submission form, which required me to include informed consent forms,
all measures such as interview protocols and outlines of other research methods, and letter from the museum that gave me permission to conduct my study in the museum. The study was fully approved by the IRB (approval number 35359) on March 29, 2010 and by the participants, who signed the informed consent forms.

**Data collection.** I used different types of data collection methods in order to triangulate the collected data, and thereby, enhance the validity of the final report. Triangulation reduces the risk that the conclusions of a study reflect prejudices and personal biases based on a single data collection method or source (Maxwell, 2005). I used interviews, including casual conversations, formal interviews, and group interviews, direct observation, journaling, other visual means, and an unconventional method of walking to collect the data. Archival data collection was obtained through the museum’s server and online research.

**Interviews.** About half of the collected data is comprised of interview transcripts. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), interviewing is a useful research method for gaining access to unobservable aspects of participants’ experience, such as their feelings or opinions. Especially in case studies whose main purpose is to obtain descriptions and interpretations of others, the interview is often used as a primary means to approach multiple realities and diverse perspectives of the case (Stake, 2005). Interviews can include individual and group face-to-face verbal exchanges as well as mailed or self-administered questionnaires and surveys (Fontana & Frey, 1994). My study includes both individual in-person interviews as well as group interviews. As mentioned above, I interviewed almost all staff members, 10 visitors, and selected community members. The total number of interviews conducted is more than 60, which include casual group conversations. All interviews except two were recorded, generating approximately
40 hours of audio data. For the two interviews that were not audio recorded, I took notes during
the interviews.

The interview questions were designed according to guidelines provided by Corrine
Glesne in her book, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (2005). I was
particularly mindful of Glesne’s advice to be aware of the relationship between research
questions and interview questions. According to Glesne, the purpose of interview questions is to
find answers to the research questions. However, she warns against directly transforming
research questions into interview questions as interview questions should be much more
contextual and specific than research questions (Glesne, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Creativity and
insight are required to compose questions which will yield answers that illuminate the
phenomenon studied by drawing from participants’ lives and perspectives in context (Glesne,
2005).

James Spradley’s book, *Ethnographic Interview*, was also instrumental in guiding the
design of my interview process and questions. Spradley (1979, p. 78) argues that ethnographic
interviewing “involves two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and
eliciting information.” In other words, it is imperative that the researcher develops a positive
rapport between herself and participants in a desirable interview setting so that participants will
feel comfortable sharing their ideas, thoughts, and experiences. “A basic sense of trust . . . allows
for the free flow of information” (Spradley, 1979, p. 78). I heeded Spradley’s advice by trying to
build a sense of trust and comfort with my participants before posing interview questions. For
example, as a warm-up to more site-specific questions, I often opened an interview by sharing
some personal information about my own professional background and asking about theirs. I did
not read prepared questions but rather memorized and infused them into the conversation as
seemed appropriate. This approach established a comfortable, informal tone. I also encouraged participants to feel free to ask me questions and to make comments at any time, to eliminate the possibility that they would feel that they were being interrogated. I think it was important that I volunteered at many events and presented myself as a helper rather than a stranger or evaluator. It was important to me that everyone involved knew that I was there to contribute to the museum rather than to simply use the museum for my own purposes.

Spradley (1979) categorized ethnographic interview questions into five groups: grand tour questions, mini-tour questions, example questions, experience questions, and native-language questions. Grand- and mini-tour questions ask participants about general images of their surroundings while example and experience questions request more detailed information about events and activities. Native-language questions are used to gain a richer understanding of the meanings of certain words and phrases or unique cultural aspects that informants are immersed in on a daily basis but may be misunderstood by outsiders. My interview incorporated all five types of interview questions. For example, in order to understand the community holistically, I asked grand tour questions, such as “What do you think about the community?” or “How would you describe your community?” I also used mini-tour questions in order to gain information about the culture and practices of the museum. I found example and experience questions very useful in examining the museum’s communication and organizational systems and day-to-day practices. I used native-language questions throughout the research process whenever I noticed unfamiliar language uses, expressions, or terms that I sensed were used in context-specific ways.

Although I had prepared interview protocols and had them with me during interviews, I tried to avoid the formal traditional position of interviewer and interviewee, where the
interviewer is expected not to show her expressions or share feelings (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Rather, I operated at the same level as my interviewees and engaged in natural conversations with them. It has been argued that this reciprocal approach makes the interviewee respond more honestly and reliably because “it treats the respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more ‘realistic’ picture that can be uncovered using traditional interview methods” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 371). I also engaged in several informal group interviews, which allowed me to observe and listen to the dynamics of group conversations and behaviors that cannot be observed in the individual setting.

**Observations.** According to Stake (2005), “observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case” (p. 60) and they are directed to the specific research questions. Adler and Adler (1994) describe observation as “the fundamental base of all research methods” (p. 389). They go on to discuss the noninterventionist and naturalistic aspect of observation as a research method (Adler & Adler, 1994). When researchers observe their subjects, they do not attempt to manipulate or deliberately set up a new experimental setting that can change the behaviors of subjects and, consequently, the results of the study (Adler & Adler, 1994). However, the level of the researcher’s involvement with the subjects and research settings can vary based on the position and role of the researcher. Over time, qualitative research in general has shifted towards greater researcher involvement to such an extent that researchers often take on a membership position (Adler & Adler, 1994; Angrosino, 2005). This is done because many researchers realize that taking an active or complete member position allows them to have deeper access to the culture and perspectives of people and place within the unique context. In addition, when a researcher enters a research setting, she is necessarily a part of it.
One critical issue related to observation is the inherent subjectivity of the observer. As Michael V. Angrosino (2005) discusses in his article “Recontextualizing Observation: Ethnography, Pedagogy, and the Prospects for a Progressive Political Agenda,” what is observed in any research process is necessarily dependent on the researcher, the subjects, and the contextual circumstances. He goes on to argue that objective truth about the phenomenon being studied cannot be established because conflicting versions and interpretations of cultures or groups of people are inevitable (Angrosino, 2005). Rather than seeing this as a liability of the method, Angrosino urges researchers to actively solicit participants’ perspectives and interpretations so that phenomena can be “viewed,” in a sense, from different angles. This type of collaborative research involves more than just asking participants for their opinions. Rather, it requires egalitarian participation from researchers and their subjects. For my study, I solicited as much feedback and involvement from participants as possible so that I could reevaluate my analysis and interpretations in light of their perspectives and avoid being blinded by personal biases or assumptions.

Journaling. For this type of qualitative study, keeping a daily journal of field notes is invaluable. Dyson and Genishi (2005) suggest that field notes should include descriptions of the physical space and activities being observed as well as reflective comments on those observations. In other words, researchers should not only record what they observe but also keep track of what they think and feel about their observations of and interactions with the research site and participants. These reflective comments can be considered an initial step of preliminary analysis and thematic coding, which become extremely helpful when subsequent analysis and interpretation commence following the period of data collection. I kept a very detailed journal of my observations and feelings while I was interacting with the research site and participants. I
documented the journal in a Word document at the end of every working day. The journal includes my comments, feelings, and preliminary analysis.

**Other visual means of data collection.** Along with collecting verbal data as described above, I also used photographs, sketches, and other visual diagrams to help reflect my understanding of the museum. According to Douglas Harper (1994), photography is traditionally associated with the field of anthropology, where it historically was used to provide visual information for the classification of races and to support theories of social evolution. Photography has also been used as a research method in the field of ethnography. While early use of photographic images in ethnography was understood to be capable of representing realistic, true depictions of the studied culture, current thinking construes photographs, like textual descriptions, to be necessarily constructed and interpreted through the cultural and personal lens of the photographer and viewers (Harper, 1994). The latter view is associated with a postmodern perspective, which views “the idea of ethnography as ‘partial truth’ rather than complete document” (Harper, 1994, p. 407). In my study, I used photography mainly as a means of collecting visual information that could serve as a visual reminder of my observations. To protect confidentiality, I cannot share the photographs that show obvious identity of the research site in this dissertation. However, they were used extensively as a way to enrich my written descriptions of the museum and the surrounding community.

Along with photographs, I incorporated visual mapping and drawing. Like the photographs, these served as reminders to me while I was writing up my findings, but they were also utilized as data display techniques in the reporting stage. These visual depictions provide readers an alternative means of making sense of analytic descriptions and interpretations. For
example, by displaying the museum’s organizational chart, readers can more easily understand my verbal explanation or description of the museum structure.

**Walking as research method.** I conceptualized walking as an essential research method in my investigation of the Avery and the River City community. I walked and rode my scooter to many places near the museum, visiting both economically depressed and vibrantly developed parts of the River City area. Although I have not found any literature that describes walking as a research method, in her article, “Making Sense of Place: Mapping as a Multisensory Research Method,” Kimberly Powell (2000) alludes to the notion of walking as a research method in discussing a mapping method. In this article, Powell (2010) shares the experience of individuals and groups of people exploring the El Chorrillo neighborhood in Panama City, Panama, through mapping and walking. Her description vividly evokes relationships among places, lived experiences, and community members.

In like fashion, by walking and riding my scooter throughout the research area, I was able to experience different landscapes and views of architecture throughout the River City area. I was able to see how different areas of River City are divided by socio-economic status and economic and residential functions through physical movement and actually being there to observe the environments. I saw that some areas in River City are wealthier and better maintained than other parts of the city. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable walking in certain areas, where houses were run down and even empty. I was even advised not to walk alone in those areas that are considered economically depressed and dangerous. Some houses were abandoned with windows and doors broken, and indecipherable words were spray painted on façade of the abandoned houses. This division of areas intensified the view that the River City community is considered a collection of many cities and towns, where people do not tend to migrate from one
to the other and do not work together as a team to improve the overall well-being of the River City metropolitan area. In addition, through riding my scooter along the river, I recognized large mansions overlooking the river, but some of them were empty and not maintained. This not only implies the current economic situation of River City but also harkens back to a time when it was a booming city on the river.

According to Rebecca Solnit (2000), “walking is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals” (p. 5). This short line explains why I had to pull out my notes so many times when I was walking in River City. It can be transferred to scootering as I had so many ideas going through my brain and had to write them down as soon as I parked.

**Data management.** A. Michael Huberman and Matthew B. Miles (1994) define data management “as the operations needed for a systematic, coherent process of data collection, storage, and retrieval” (p. 428). Huberman and Miles (1994), Stake (2005), and Dyson and Genishi (2005) emphasize the importance of timely record keeping of events being observed and reflective descriptions and comments for further analysis and the final written report. After raw experiences and conversations are collected through various methods, they should be converted into compiled, extended texts, which facilitate their subsequent interpretation. For example, audio and video recordings from meetings, interviews, and casual conversations must be carefully transcribed and put into readily accessible forms. One reason that the compiling process is necessary is that raw field notes and researchers’ comments collected rapidly in the moment of observation often include indecipherable scribbles. They must be processed, corrected, extended, explained, edited, and typed up for easy access later by both the researcher herself as well as by other readers (Huberman & Miles, 1994). When raw data are not processed in a timely manner, data management can easily get out of control, and it can become difficult to retrieve needed data.
for analysis and interpretation later. Stake (2005) and Dyson and Genishi (2005) encourage researchers to have a reliable data management system and use many developed technologies and computer programs, if necessary.

All raw data collected for my research was processed as rapidly as possible. As mentioned earlier, I transferred observations and reflections from my handwritten research journal into a Word document on a daily basis. Because of the large amount of audio data collected, it was impossible to transcribe recordings immediately. Rather, I established a regular transcription schedule that allowed the completion of transcription of all interviews and conversations into text from within two months after leaving the research site. In order to complete transcriptions in this timeframe, I utilized professional transcribers for about three quarters of the data and transcribed the rest myself. I concurrently analyzed data and wrote up preliminary findings on a daily basis to keep myself in touch with the writing process and to maintain close familiarity with the data.

I did not find it necessary to use specialized software for data management. Instead, I created my own organizational system. As data collection and processing proceeded, I identified the following data filing categories: Museum, Community, Interviews, and Research Journal. Anything that did not fit neatly into one of these categories was filed in a Miscellaneous folder. Although I had a great deal of data, this management system allowed for easy access to a complicated data set that, in turn, facilitated efficient initial analysis exercises. I sorted physical data materials into these different files, and subsequently sorted them thematically, which is discussed in the following section. While I used color coding and print-outs to physically move my writings into proper themes, sorted writings were always kept in a Word format to avoid any confusion or missing parts.
Data analysis and interpretation. In a case study project, data analysis and interpretation do not take place at a particular point in time (Stake, 1995). Rather, these processes occur simultaneously as the researcher observes the case, talks to people, and continually refines research questions and the overall research design. Recording the observer’s comments and breakthroughs in the field is part of preliminary data analysis. It allows the researcher a fresh opportunity to identify configurations, relationships, and patterns of people, culture, and community being studied even in the relatively initial stage of data collection. This was the case for me as I started my initial analysis by recording breakthroughs and repetitive or memorable patterns during the data collection period.

According to Huberman and Miles (1994), data analysis involves three interrelated processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. If data are not systematically selected, sorted, and reduced based on research questions and theoretical framework of the study, they tend to be unwieldy and difficult to analyze (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Once the collected data are reduced, they should be displayed in ways that allow researchers to more easily observe meanings and draw conclusions. Possible forms of data display include “structured summaries, synopses, vignettes, diagrams, and matrices” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 429). Conclusion drawing and verification are the terms used to describe the process of identifying meaning from the displayed data. This process involves identifying patterns and themes, performing triangulation, looking for negative cases, and asking for verification of opinions from participants (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

While Huberman and Miles provide a general definition and approach to data analysis, Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (2002) provide more detailed step-by-step data analysis techniques in their book, Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory.
and Methods. They show examples, such as observation notes and coding systems based on real educational research conducted previously (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen (2002) advise researchers to read their collected data many times until they see repeated words and phrases, patterns of behaviors and ways of thinking, and events repeating and standing out. Maxwell (2005) agrees that the initial step of data analysis is reading all of the collected data, such as interview transcripts or observational notes. Maxwell (2005) encourages researchers to make notes on reflections and comments while they read to assist in the process of developing tentative ideas about categories and relationships emerging from the information. This simple and substantial process of reading data and getting familiar with them can help researchers discover regularities, patterns, and significant topics in their data and select words and phrases to represent the emerged categories, patterns, and topics, which then become coding categories or units (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). This approach helps researchers reduce the amount of data and organize them by categories and topics, making them much more manageable and retrievable.

Maxwell (2005) argues that the main categorizing strategy is coding, which he divides into three distinctive categories: organizational, substantive, and theoretical. Organizational categories serve as bins to sort data into several separate broad areas or issues. Substantive categories are descriptive and often include informants’ concepts and beliefs. Substantive categories can thus, in a sense, be considered “emic,” which is believed to be the perspectives of participants. However, in reality many of them are not because they are inevitably shaped by the researcher’s perspective and approach to the case, events, and people being studied (Maxwell, 2005). Theoretical categories help sort data into a more general or abstract framework and can be derived from an existing theory or from a new theory inductively developed during data analysis (Maxwell, 2005). Theoretical categories represent the researcher’s concepts rather than the
informant’s concepts. Therefore, this type of category is the most “etic” one, based on the researcher’s observations and, thus, perspectives (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher must eventually find relationships among the categories in order to write a coherent report and build theory. Maxwell’s three types of categories, organizational, substantive, and theoretical, describe my coding system well. Organizational categories became chapters and titles of subsections in my dissertation while substantive and theoretical categories were interwoven into each section in order to describe, explain, and interpret in a thematic manner what I had collected, observed, and experienced.

Karen Keifer-Boyd (in press) describes data analysis as a layered process that involves four interconnected steps, which enables researchers to visit the raw data multiple times. The first step is to do initial coding based on research questions and a theoretical lens. The second step is to write about emerging codes, catalogues, patterns, and metaphors in prose (Keifer-Boyd, in press). The third layer involves finding larger themes or metaphors that subsume initial categories and coding units (Keifer-Boyd, in press). In the third step, more elaborate interpretations and analysis are built supported by theories and examples (Keifer-Boyd, in press). The last layer is to reveal and support arguments and results of the study in order to include what has been known, valued, and interpreted based on research questions (Keifer-Boyd, in press). I incorporated the layered data analysis strategy in order to visit my data multiple times and add depth to my analysis and interpretations. This is also a method of triangulation, allowing multiple angles of data analysis and reducing interpretation mistakes and errors.

After the completion of data collection and preliminary analysis on site, more substantial data analysis process started by reducing the amount of data based on emerging themes and patterns and research questions. As Bogdan and Biklen and Maxwell suggested, I read and
examined interview transcripts, recorded observations, and my research journal many times until I was able to discern emerging categories, themes, and patterns. My approach to coding and analyzing interview transcripts was exhaustive and holistic. After I reduced the data and constructed my overarching categories and subcategories, which is the first layer of Keifer-Boyd’s strategy, I created a visual matrix of organizational, substantive, and theoretical categories as described by Maxwell (2005). The top row of the matrix included several large themes, and summaries and subcategories were located under the larger themes. For example, I located communication system, community perception, museum building, work culture, organizational structure, programs and exhibitions, and others on the top row of the matrix as the organizational categories, which served as organizing bins. Substantive and theoretical categories were located under organizational categories. For instance, the elitist perception about the museum that was described by many participants is a substantive category and was located under community perception, an organizational category.

Based on the matrix, I went back and read the data again, displaying more summarized and relevant data using structured summaries (e.g., bullet points), synopses, vignettes, and tables forming preliminary chapters and subsections, which is the second step of the layered data analysis strategy. Displayed rough data with categories and subcategories became the very first draft of my dissertation, which was no more than reduced raw data. Theoretical categories described by Maxwell emerged when I analyzed the reduced and displayed data using the matrix. For example, I identified the museum’s quality as a leading visual arts educational organization and its diverse outreach programs as an active element of the community even though there were challenges in reaching out to diverse community members in River City. I created the following theoretical categories: 1) effective and relevant museum qualities and programs and 2)
challenges of the museum. This process is closely related to the third step of the layered data analysis. At this point, I started to form more elaborate patterns, interpretations, and arguments that were closely related to research questions and to the theoretical approach of my methodology. The next step was to identify meanings and draw conclusions, the fourth step of the layered data analysis. In other words, I re-analyzed my reduced and displayed data to achieve a more cohesive explanation and tight argument demonstrated by evidence, examples, and existing literature. I color-coded this preliminary written report and shifted elements around to make the material textually and visually clearer and more coherent. I reworked the material until I was satisfied that the data, descriptions, and arguments were represented as clearly as possible.

Because I closely followed Huberman and Miles’ three interrelated processes in data analysis, Maxwell’s coding system, and Keifer-Boyd’s layered data analysis, my data analysis exercise became controllable and efficient, which led to a more successful final report. However, data analysis and interpretation is a complex and messy process and did not end until I had the final written report. Through the process of writing, revising, and editing, I continued to make changes in my interpretation and conclusions of the study.

**Limitations of the Methods**

I recognize a number of limitations of my research methods and the study in general. First of all, as a human being, I have biases and cannot be free of assumptions, which is described in Chapter One under the Assumptions and Limitations section. I look at things through my own lens to understand the Avery and analyze the collected data. Although I was as open as possible, no researcher can accurately and comprehensively represent the voice and perspective of every participant. There could be many different versions of what was happening at the Avery during those three months and my interpretation is just one of them. In other words,
there is not one story that is absolutely true, although I did my best to be as objective and thorough as possible.

I was concerned about how open museum staff members would be to an outsider they had never met before the commencement of the study. While most Avery staff members seemed to be open to me, the staff may have answered questions or behaved in ways that differ from usual in order to present a certain image. Related to this is the need for time to build the quality of relationship that allows more openness. In order for the staff to feel fully comfortable around me, it may have taken more time. Yet, I had a limited amount of time to conduct the study. In addition, because I was an outsider to the museum and its community, I confronted something unique to the region that took me a while to understand: Midwestern mediocrity, which is explained in Chapter Four. Perhaps this delayed understanding was an indication that I was looking at the phenomenon with fresh eyes. In addition, there certainly were limited spaces where I was not allowed. For example, I was not allowed to attend the museum’s executive board meeting, although I was allowed to sit in on other types of board meetings. This reduced the opportunity to see how some of the executive and financial decisions were made and negotiated.

The duration of the study could be a limitation as well. I felt that three months was sufficient to complete a single comprehensive set of interviews and observations and understand the Avery’s organizational and communication systems, work culture, and its interactions with the community. However, three months is a relatively short period of time when seen from the standpoint of traditional ethnographic research. My study is an ethnographic case study—its intent is to study the organizational culture of a single institution as opposed to the large cultural units (e.g., a tribe or village) that are often examined in the field of anthropology. I acknowledge
that the quality and characteristics of my data would have been different if I had devoted a longer time period to my research. My observations reflect, of course, the exhibitions, programs, meetings, and policies that happened to be under development or on display during the summer of 2011. However, in any research project, the desire for the broadest data set possible has to be balanced with issues of feasibility and the researcher’s time constraints. I am satisfied that the time allotted for this study was adequate to gain significant insights into the research questions under investigation.

The study does not generalize, in the sense of quantitative research, since it deals qualitatively with a specific museum in a unique community. Rather, as I described earlier in this chapter, generalization can happen by readers who can interpret my study in different ways and apply their understandings to the specific practices of their own unique situations. It was never my intention to personally change the Avery through my research, especially since I do not have the authority to do this. Rather, my intent was that my analysis could generate a number of suggestions that staff members of the Avery and comparable institutions find helpful as they seek ways to improve their practices in positive directions.

Another limitation of the study is that I was unable to interview everybody in the community. I was able to interview all staff members except some board members and security staff members. I was in contact with seven out of 21 board members and interviewed only two out of six or seven security staff members. In addition, I did not talk to all visitors to the Avery. I was able to interview 10 visitors. More importantly, I did not interact with non-visitors in the community. I acknowledge that excluding these perspectives limits my understanding of the community and why some people do not participate in the Avery’s exhibitions, programs, and
activities. Extending the research to these untapped resources is a very promising area for future research, which is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

**Reflection**

While I began with a solid sense of my initial research approach, design, and questions as well as actively collecting data at the site, I found the need to revise my research design and strategies along the way. For example, I frequently changed the wording of prepared interview questions to make my speech more easily understood by participants. Also, while I originally planned to record all staff meetings that I could attend, I quickly realized if there was one person who did not agree to be recorded at the meeting then I could not do it at all. I learned to take memos during staff meetings and other events and recorded emerging questions for one-on-one interviews with the staff for later times.

Many qualitative research scholars and authors have argued that qualitative studies are reflective, flexible, complicated, and inductive rather than fixed, linear, and conductive (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Stake, 1994). I found this to be the case as I discovered the value of constantly revising my research design to refine my lens and thoughts within the context of the case. I also found that interesting and unexpected concepts clearly emerged during the process of data analysis. For example, although I had never considered these ideas in the research design process, concepts of a Midwest mindset and culture became part of final written report as part of understanding and describing the River City community. I also did not know that the museum economically benefited the community through becoming a selling point and cultural attraction for businesses and executive directors to move to River City and invest in the area. These emerging concepts as well as data analysis and interpretations are discussed in detail in Chapters Four through Eight.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE RIVER CITY COMMUNITY

River City is located in the central region of the United States, which is approximately 800 miles from where I live in State College, Pennsylvania. It took me almost 13 hours to get there by car. When I got close to River City, many cars suddenly filled the previously empty highway. Three bridges above the Central River connect the different cities in River City, and it turned out that one of them was being repaired. I used the East Bridge to cross the river to get to Watertown, one of the cities in the River City area, where the Avery Art Museum is located. The Central River was calm and dark blue. It crosses in the middle of the River City metropolitan area and forms the border between two Midwestern states. When I drove through the Watertown downtown area to get to the house where I was about to live for three months, I noticed that some of the storefronts were empty and the roads did not seem to be well maintained. A large four-lane one-way road did not have visible lines to demarcate the lanes. When I arrived in the neighborhood where I had rented a room, it was very quiet. The neighborhood is mainly residential and enclosed by two main one-way streets that run to the north and south, respectively. It is about 10 blocks north from the downtown area and up on a hill. The neighborhood was somewhat rundown—houses and streets were in disrepair. I learned from my landlord that the neighborhood is mostly occupied by middle-income families and college students who attend a well-known chiropractic college located adjacent to the neighborhood.

The next day, Sunday, I decided to walk to the Avery Art Museum and explore the city on foot; it took me about 20 minutes to get to the downtown area. The walk was beautiful, and I observed different styles of buildings and houses. I noted that there was no one else walking on the street. On the way, I saw a high school on my right, which is located on the edge of the chiropractic college campus. Right next to the high school, there was a large fenced field where I
later saw high school students practicing sports, band practices, and other activities. I saw college students and community members using the field as well. The main street I walked on that Sunday connects my place to the waterfront. I was able to enjoy the river view as I walked down the hill. The street also runs right through the center of the chiropractic college campus. I saw college buildings and labs and some residential buildings, including traditional houses and relatively taller apartment buildings (no more than six to seven stories tall). The houses and buildings were old and slightly rough but evoked an old town charm. When I got closer to the downtown area, I noticed an increase in the number of larger, taller buildings. The styles and eras of the buildings were mixed, mostly ranging from 1890s to 1930s. Various architectural styles, including Art Deco, Renaissance Revival, Chicago School, and International, are represented in the downtown Watertown area.

It was around eleven o’clock in the morning when I arrived in the waterfront area. I did not see a single person on the street and could not find a café that was open. All shops were closed, and the downtown was empty. Later, I ran into a couple who were also looking for a place to sit and eat but they could not help me because they were also visitors to River City. I also saw a number of homeless people on the street. I later found out that there are two homeless shelters in downtown Watertown. I grew up in the bustling city of Busan in South Korea where shops are open on Sundays. Most South Korean metropolitan cities, especially Busan, include a mix of residential, entertainment, and business centers. Therefore, downtown areas are busier on weekends. In addition, State College, where I currently live, is a university town; its downtown is pedestrian friendly, and stores and cafés are open on Sundays. Because of my background, downtown Watertown seemed odd to me even though I have learned that many cities in the

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2 Also known as Commercial style and mostly developed at the turn of 20th century.
United States have different zones for businesses and residences, and shops tend to close on Sundays partly for religious reasons.

I walked to the waterfront to see the Central River running through the heart of River City. The river view was stunning (Figure 1). When I looked back at the city view with the river behind me, I noticed a shiny rectangular green glass building looking down on the river. It was the Avery Art Museum. I looked for an entrance to the Avery but could not find one easily. Since I walked from the waterfront, I automatically thought the façade that faces the river would be connected to the main entrance. There was a massive outside staircase (Figure 2) that led to the second floor of the building but the doors were locked. Later I found out that the museum opens at noon on Sunday and the main entrance for the general public is located on the opposite side of the building, although people can use the back doors.
Figure 2. The back façade of the Avery Art Museum.

The Avery building is distinctive and reminded me of a well-refined minimalist artwork. A Renaissance Revival style stone building right next to the museum on the left side of the main entrance creates a sharp contrast with the Avery’s look in terms of size, style, color, and sensation. While the grey stone building, which is a bank, is taller and narrower, the Avery building looks like two rectangular boxes stacked on top of the other. The top part is narrower than the bottom, creating a visual and physical stability. The shape and surrounding environment of the Avery reminded me of the Tate Modern (Figure 3) in London while the color, surface, and concept of the Avery reminded me of the New Museum (Figure 4) in New York City. The Tate Modern does not have a second rectangular box on top of the main building but it sits on the bank of the Thames River looking down upon a water view. The New Museum building resembles the color and concept of the Avery and creates a high visual contrast from the rest of the neighborhood on Bowery Street.
Figures 3 & 4. The Tate Modern and the New Museum.

The lack of information posted on the exterior of the Avery building allowed for a cleaner, more minimalist aesthetic. However, I saw small advertising flags of programs and exhibitions attached to light poles near the building and on nearby streets. I also noticed that some public transit buses had advertising for the Avery on the sides and back. The museum grounds include a plaza in front of the main entrance. The left half of the plaza is used as a parking lot, with extra parking being made available in a lot shared with the bank next door. The other half on the right side has two benches, trees, and a sculpture by Sol Lewitt, a minimalist and conceptual artist. Lewitt’s sculpture is the shape of a tall grey rectangular box, and each side has geometric shapes with patterns carved into the shapes. The Avery building is recessed from the street approximately 200 feet. The total size of the plaza is approximately 38,000 square feet.

I opened this chapter with my first impression of River City and descriptions of the Avery Art Museum. While these descriptions are based on my personal impression as an outsider who had never been to River City prior to the research, I unfold more descriptions, perspectives, and characteristics of the River City Community and the Avery Art Museum through multiple interpretations and perspectives from my participants in Chapters Four and Five. Throughout these chapters, I provide a deep description of the community and the museum and how they are interconnected or disconnected. I paint a picture of the messy, holistic reality and culture of how
a museum functions in complex relation to its community. There are a number of complex and
cultural relationships to be found through this research. In Chapters Four and Five, I describe the
museum and community as mutable entities that must transition and evolve in response to
changes in their environments.

Chapter Four focuses on the community. It provides a general sense and the unique
community culture where the museum is located and which it primarily serves. While I discuss
the community’s overall characteristics and culture, I mainly focus on its economy,
demographics, arts and culture, work relationships with other organizations, and education. In
doing so, I paint a portrait of the museum’s larger social, cultural background and potential
audiences.

The River City Community

River City is a metropolitan area that includes several cities and adjacent towns with a
total population under 400,000 with approximately 150,000 households. Some of the cities in the
region were founded in the early 1800s. River City is situated across two Midwestern states.
While four or five large cities mostly comprise the River City area, there are small towns and
cities that are also part of it. Some people consider the four surrounding counties to be included
in the area while others consider the area to end at the borders of four large cities. River City is
not an official district title but it is used ubiquitously in the area and even nationwide. According
to Michael, the director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau in River City, a manufacturing
marketing company started to use the name “River City Development Group” (personal
communication, August 3, 2011) to attract more businesses and factories to the area in the 1960s.
Since then, people have called the area River City. The area encompassed by the name has
grown over time, including more adjacent small communities. Therefore, the entire community
is promoted as River City, a way to visualize somewhat separate diverse cities and towns as one large interconnected metropolitan area.

The River City area was economically vibrant while the agriculture and manufacturing industries boomed in the 1940s and 1950s but has experienced an economic downturn since major companies and farming equipment manufacturers closed and moved to less expensive areas in the 1970s and 1980s. The city is trying to revitalize the downtown area in order to have more people live there and partake of the amenities. However, I hardly ran into any pedestrians there, and it felt empty. For example, there are almost no grocery stores, pharmacies, or any shopping areas that would attract people to downtown Watertown. Instead, people go shopping at the mall, Walmart, or Target, which are located about 3 miles or more from the downtown waterfront where the museum is located. This explained why I did not see a single person downtown on weekends.

I often walked around the Watertown area in my spare time and noticed large, empty mansions on the waterfront, evidence of the once economically booming City of Watertown. According to Jason, the director of the Alternative Theater, who also grew up in the region, “There was a heyday of Watertown. At one time, Watertown was this vibrant place where commerce took place, and it was more like a big city. There was a trolley system that ran through the downtown. There were all kinds of small stores and big stores, and it’s not like that now” (personal communication, June 8, 2011). Likewise, in several downtown areas in River City, many of the storefronts and buildings are empty and seem to have been abandoned for quite a while.

The four main cities in the River City area are: East City, Middletown, Watertown, and South City. East City is mainly residential while Watertown is a hub for businesses, cultural and
non-profit organizations, and entertainment. Watertown has a casino (founded in the 1990s) on the waterfront of the Central River. Watertown is also home to both the River City Chamber of Commerce, which is located only a block from the Avery, and a large baseball stadium, located less than 10 blocks from the museum. Other businesses and cultural organizations are scattered throughout the four cities. For example, the Botanical Garden and Central Zoo are located in Middletown, while the River City Arts Organization is in South City. I explain the details of the arts and cultural institutions in the Arts and Culture section below. Middletown is an island city enclosed by the Central River and located between Watertown and South City. The government arsenal is located in Middletown, which has a number of cultural amenities such as the River City Ballet, small theaters, and art galleries. It has welcomed a sizeable number of refugees and immigrants who came to the United States for a better and safer life. Lastly, South City has its own downtown and residential areas and is home to the headquarters for several large manufacturing companies. It also has an international airport, sitting on approximately 2,500 acres of land, which is used by all members of River City and adjacent counties. Universities, colleges, and community colleges are scattered throughout the four cities. While East City and Watertown are located in one state, Middletown and South City are in the other.

The Avery Art Museum is located in Watertown, one of the largest cities in the River City area. After the Avery became privatized in 2003 and moved to the current location in 2005, the museum’s targeted service area expanded beyond Watertown to the greater River City area. According to the museum’s American Association of Museums (AAM) accreditation self-study, the museum provides educational and visual art experiences in 15 surrounding rural counties.
Characteristics of River City

My participants described the River City community as family-oriented and very friendly compared to other large cities, such as Chicago and New York City. It is often described as politically and culturally conservative, and as such, not very open to other cultures and perspectives. As evidence of this, I noticed that it was difficult to find a restaurant that served cuisine from different cultures or special diet food such as vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free. People who are from the region tend to stay in the community or return after some schooling or job experience to raise their families because of the strong sense of community and affordable cost of living. According to the museum’s outreach coordinator, Emily, River City is changing to include more diverse cultures and perspectives and become more community-oriented. Therefore, in her opinion, the city needs more young people with new ideas to be part of the change. She said the community welcomes the input of young people in important community meetings and decision-making processes.

The entire River City area is small enough to get anywhere within 30 minutes and there is almost no traffic except in the summer when the bridges of the Central River are under restoration. However, it is large enough to have cultural and educational opportunities as well as weekly activities for community members to enjoy. There are several bike paths and parks around the Central River in all four cities where community members can exercise and spend quality time with their families. Most people shop and hang out in River City’s two large shopping malls located in Watertown and South City. The summer of 2011 was unusually hot in the Midwest, which was one of the reasons many community members went to the malls rather than spending time in downtown areas, waterfronts, or parks.
The museum’s store manager, Julie, described River City as a “big little town” (personal communication, July 13, 2011). Jillian, who is a museum committee member³ and from the Washington, D. C., area, said, “It’s a collection of small cities or small towns, and maybe the overall population sounds fairly big, but I still feel like it’s very small” (personal communication, June 8, 2011). Residential areas are spreading to suburban areas making River City sprawling and larger but not centralized.

The River City area has eight different public transit systems. For example, Watertown has its own transit system called the Watertown City Bus while Middletown has the Middletown Metro. These different systems are called River City transit as a whole and connected by the Loop that connects all the sub-communities and cities of the River City area. Loop buses are available every 30 minutes and cost $1 per ride. Water taxies are seasonally available. The public transportation system is not very popular among community members because it is fairly easy to get around the area in private motor vehicles. The perception of my participants was that public buses are not convenient and do not come often enough. They explained that they can get to any place in River City within 30 minutes by car while they may have to wait 30 minutes just to board a bus. Some said that it is difficult to get to different sections of River City using public transportation because River City has eight separate systems that are only connected by the Loop. I also found the system to be inconvenient and tended to use my scooter to get to interviews and arts and cultural events.

Economy

The major industries of River City traditionally have been manufacturing and farming. Several heavy industry companies, including Alcoa, an aluminum producer, and John Deere, a

³ Committees are subsets of the museum board. They mainly consist of board members but several committees include members from the community.
farming equipment manufacturer, have offices in River City and are the largest employers in the area. According to demographic data collected by the museum’s former intern and student of the Museum Studies program, Sarah, who is also an associate professor in Communications at a local university, heavy industry companies are the largest employers in the region, followed by the government arsenal and the health care system. While the focus on heavy industry and farming carries through to the present day, there have been some changes in the industrial and economic structure of River City. The area is becoming more education-, service-, and tourism-oriented, having a number of universities and colleges and major museums and arts organizations as well as a casino and hotels. The director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau in River City, Michael (personal communication, August 3, 2011), explained that because of the changes in the main industries of River City, the community has had to diversify its economy, and workers have had to be trained to work in education, arts, and other service industries.

Many community members and museum staff believe that there is almost no tourism in the region and that the museum does not tend to attract visitors from other regions and countries. However, Michael, the director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, tells a different story. He acknowledged that most community members do not understand or appreciate tourism. However, based on data from the US Travel Association in 2009, he explained, the region gets about a million visitors a year and they spent about $654 million in River City and adjacent areas in 2009. River City employs the full-time equivalent of 7,700 people in tourism and service businesses, and has 5,400 hotel rooms, a casino, and other tourist attractions. He remarked, “If we don’t have tourism, then why do we have all this stuff? Why would we need any hotel rooms if we didn’t have a tourism industry? Why would we have the casino, which can’t function on just what River City residents gamble? The Avery can’t stay open just based on locals” (Michael,

4 The Avery Art Museum is affiliated with a local university’s Museum Studies program.
personal communication, August 3, 2011). He argued that hotels and other tourism-related services are economic engines like large farming equipment companies and factories.

While some people see the economy of the area as slow, Michael feels optimistic about the present and future of the River City economy. He said, “It’s being reinvented, being more lively than it was 25 years ago. They revitalized the downtown areas, remodeling old warehouses and business buildings into condos and apartments, trying to attract people to live in the downtown area” (Michael, personal communication, August 3, 2011). Since the 1990s, the River City community has been trying to revitalize all downtown areas. Moving the Avery into the middle of downtown to be close to other cultural amenities and businesses was part of the Watertown downtown revitalization project. According to local and national media, the revitalization project has been successful, and its economy is booming again. River City has an unemployment rate that is lower than the country’s average, and more new jobs are created every year.

**Demographics**

The ethnic composition in River City is fairly homogenous: 80% White, 7% African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, and 2% Asian. Many participants told me that River City is diverse for the Midwest in terms of ethnicities and cultures, but they also added that the Midwest region as a whole is not very diverse. River City is more diverse in educational levels, socioeconomic status, age, professions, and life and leisure styles compared to its ethnic and racial composition but still quite homogeneous. About 20% of the population has a bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately 40% of the population works in the manufacturing industry. While education and service industries are currently being developed and becoming popular, heavy and farming industries still contribute the most to the community’s economy. There is a
significant farming community in the surrounding area as well. Therefore, all my participants considered River City a blue-collar community. According to the demographic data collected by Sarah, a former student of the Museum Studies program and associate professor in Communication, in 2010, the median household income was about $46,000 and more than 45% of the households earned over $50,000. Like many other cities in the United States, the population is becoming older; more than 40% of the population is 45 years old and older. Sarah’s data shows that the median age is approximately 40 and one third of the population is between the ages of 25 and 44. While there is concern about brain drain, the community has a fair amount of young and emerging professionals who are between 35 and 54 years of age.

While some see that the community has changed a lot in the last few years and has more diverse cultures than in the 1960s and 70s, the River City region is noticeably divided geographically by socio-economic status and ethnic groups. These different groups do not tend to migrate from one place to the other even though they are very close to each other. Most people use their personal motor vehicles to pass through different communities to get to main shopping areas or to go to work. For some people who do not own a personal vehicle, the Central River is an obstacle to travel. Many participants were able to draw lines between sub-communities that are separated based on their ethnic and economic similarities and differences. My landlord went so far as to circle an area on the map that I should not enter due to danger associated with gangs and drug dealers.

One area of River City, which is distinguished by its ethnic and economic make-up, is Middletown. This city is highly populated by immigrants and refugees from other countries who tend not to regularly spend time in other areas of River City. Many community members have recognized the dysfunction of immigrant isolation and are seeking to remedy the situation. For
example, one initiative, which began in 2010, brings together like-minded people from the City of Middletown, churches, and colleges to generate ideas about how to facilitate the transition of refugees and immigrants on a policy level. This group of people had created several study circles, comprised of approximately 130 community members, immigrants, and refugees from Middletown and the greater River City area. Each study group had created a list of proposals to address refugee and immigrant challenges for five weeks prior to the final assembly meeting. The purpose of the final meeting I attended was for participants to share what they have developed, select the most promising ideas, and find ways to apply them through public policy changes. Using translators, immigrants and refugees from various countries were also invited to share stories of the difficulties they have faced in trying to establish themselves in the area. Language, housing, and transportation issues were frequently cited as barriers to greater integration and upward mobility. Being an observer of this valuable event was a very touching and emotional experience. While my status as a green card holder is nowhere close to what most immigrants and refugees experience, I was able to feel the difficulties and fear of foreigners in the United States as I often experienced similar difficulties in my first several years in this country.

In contrast to the areas with heavy immigrant populations, East City is an area known for its mostly White, economically comfortable residents.

**Arts and Culture**

As the economy is shifting to one that values education, service, and tourism, the River City area has seen a great increase in the number and size of arts and cultural institutions and venues throughout its different cities. Some organizations were established almost a hundred years ago while many are only a couple of decades old or younger. For example, all four cities of
the River City region have their own public libraries established in the early to late 1800s. The Science Museum, located in Watertown, was founded in the late 1870s, and is one of the oldest museums in the cities developed near the Central River. Later, this museum added an IMAX theater that is popular among families and children. The Science Museum is located on a hill two miles northwest of the Avery. The Historical House Museum consists of two buildings that were built in the 1870s and 1890s respectively and is located in South City. The House Museum is affiliated with the Avery through one educational outreach program.

The River City Symphony, founded in the late 1920s, now performs more than 50 times a year in different venues across River City. According to participants, the symphony is very popular among community members and has been successful in making community members feel welcome at classical music performances without giving the impression of elitism or high culture. It also offers youth and family programs. The symphony is based in Watertown but performs in theaters, hotels, and parks in all four cities.

The River City Theater is another institution that has been in the community for about 100 years. The theater was established in the 1930s and has been remodeled several times. It was recently expanded to accommodate more people and performances and was reopened in the late 2000s. The symphony often performs at the River City Theater.

Younger and more recent arts and cultural institutions include: the Central Zoo (Middletown, late 1960s), the River City Arts Organization (South City, 1970), the River City Ballet (Middletown, late 1990s), the Botanical Garden (Middletown, late 1990s), the Children’s Museum (East City, 1995), the Music Experience Center (Watertown, 2004), the Midwest Fine Arts Organization (Middletown, 2004), the Artstown Center (Watertown, 2005)—a component of the Midwest Fine Arts Organization—and the Alternative Theater (Watertown, 2010). Four of
the museums in the area (the Avery Art Museum, the Children’s Museum, the Science Museum, and the Central Zoo) are accredited by the American Association of Museums and the American Zoological Association. As the founding dates show, these organizations were established during and after large heavy industry companies and factories moved out of River City and are, therefore, related to the efforts to diversify and revitalize the region’s economy.

River City offers a variety of arts and cultural festivals throughout the year. While downtown areas are not usually vibrant on a day-to-day basis, they do become alive with people from River City and the surrounding regions, when arts and cultural festivals take place. The Watertown downtown is the most popular spot for festivals because of its arts and cultural amenities such as the Avery, the Music Experience Center, the Artstown Center, the casino, and many hotels. Many arts festival exhibitors use the Avery’s plaza as a space to set up booths. The Avery also participates through outdoor art-making activities and offering free admission during festivals. River City also offers a number of festivals related to cultural origins, such as Greek, Irish, and Jewish festivals. Music festivals in a variety of genres are especially popular, including classical, jazz, blues, and pop music. The River City Symphony is often involved with these music festivals. Music festivals offer concerts all around town, such as in parks, churches, hotels, and museums. River City also offers a fireworks party on the Fourth of July every year, and a unique fest that combines a marathon with music and visual art. Amateur and professional runners from all over the nation and world come to participate in this marathon fest. River City is in the center of the race route and features other arts activities for participants and community members to enjoy.

According to my participants, the festivals and music venues seem to increase every year. A local art teacher who grew up in River City said that sometimes he cannot believe how much
improvement there is in terms of opportunities and things to do on the weekends with the arts. I was surprised to see downtown Watertown full of people during these festivals. When I was in River City, I was able to attend two festivals. For both occasions, I was amazed by the variety of activities and programs and active participation from local community members and tourists. According to my participants, the number of festivals and participants has grown significantly over the past two or three decades. This trend is also closely related to the economy shifting from manufacturing to service. This increasing number of arts institutions and venues has created new jobs and reoriented community members’ leisure choices and styles.

**Working with Other Organizations**

The Avery’s former director, Ken, was successful at instigating partnerships with local cultural and educational institutions in the community. Since 2008, the museum has provided space for local universities to use its studio and gallery spaces for classes. For example, a local liberal arts college teaches its painting and drawing classes at the museum’s studio, which provides a spacious place to make art that the college lacks. As part of this initiative, the Midwestern University’s Museum Studies program has been affiliated with the Avery. Several partnerships with other local colleges also gave free admission to students of the partnered institutions. The Avery’s newly constructed spacious storages make it possible to store collections from other universities and museums that do not have enough space to store them. The museum has broadened its offerings by showing some of these collections as special exhibitions.

The Avery provides an ideal practicum space for students in the Museum Studies program at the Midwestern University. While the partnership between the museum and the program has only been established for three years, the relationship is evolving. Considering that
students in the program also help with the museum with their research and internships, their relationship has turned out to be symbiotic. The director of the program, Tina, who also shares office space with other Avery staff members, said that the museum and the Museum Studies program keep inching towards an integrated partnership. The discussion of the Museum Studies program continues in the next section. By keeping these partnerships with local colleges and universities, the museum has been a hub for visual art resources in the community and adjacent areas. Currently, the museum maintains partnerships with seven local universities and colleges.

The Avery maintains partnerships with some of the museums in the area. For example, the Avery partners with three museums in River City—the Music Experience Center, the Historical House Museum, and the Botanical Garden—to provide a set of interactive presentations based on the participating museums’ educational programs. The Avery also provided a small exhibit at the Watertown Public Library. This exhibit featured facsimiles of animal etchings from the museum’s collection in the display case in the library’s common area. It also had drawing and quiz activities for children near the display area. As well, the museum is trying to accomplish partnerships with other arts organizations such as the River City Orchestra and the River City Ballet. During my research at the museum in the summer of 2011, the museum’s associate curator and other staff members had met with representatives from the orchestra and ballet groups to discuss possible partnerships and collaboration in programming and event planning. Some organizations are also connected to the Avery more indirectly. For example, Emily, the outreach coordinator, is a member of the community-based arts education support group, the Midwest Arts Education, comprised of art teachers, arts organization directors, and other educators in the community. Through Emily, the members meet at the museum where they make plans to use museum amenities and resources for future arts education
projects and promotion. The Midwest Arts Education will be further explained in the next section, Education.

The Avery has partnerships with regional businesses and international companies who have local offices in River City. The museum has shown part of a heavy manufacturing company’s corporate art collection, and the company sponsors the museum’s free family days, other programs, and charity events. The company’s vice president is on the board at the Avery as well. The Avery is also trying to connect to local charity and non-profit organizations, such as an environmental group, a breast cancer awareness group, and a child hunger prevention group. For example, the museum had a charity event at the lobby to pack food for children in Haiti, which is further discussed in Chapter Six.

Education

The educational system or infrastructure can be considered a subset of the arts and cultural scenery of the River City community as most arts and cultural institutions are educational sites for life-long learning and exposure to new experiences. Almost all arts and cultural organizations that I discussed in the previous section include education in their mission statements or/and roles. For example, the River City Symphony and the Music Experience Center emphasize music education while the Avery and the Artstown Center promote visual art education through their exhibitions, programs, and hands-on art-making workshops.

In this section, I focus on the public school and higher education systems. River City has seven different public school districts that serve suburban areas as well. For example, Watertown has its own public school district, called the Watertown Community School District, which includes 30 high, middle, and elementary schools. Many of my participants asserted that the public education system in River City is very good in terms of test scores and literacy levels.
According to the study conducted by a professional research firm for a local health care company, the community has higher ratings of public schools, better graduation and dropout rates, and a better literacy rate compared to the national average. According to the River City Times, however, studies show that approximately three students drop out of school in River City every school day. It is also estimated that more than 500 students in the area drop out annually.

Several local public schools’ report cards show that evaluation is based on certain subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science. Some public school teachers whom I interviewed stated that the public school education in River City is not balanced because it focuses only on subjects that are tested and compared state and nationwide. For example, some of the elementary schools in at least one school district do not offer any visual art classes. While other school districts offer visual art programs, they are not valued as much as the tested subjects. According to several school improvement plans of public schools in Watertown, the emphasis and value of visual art education comes after writing/reading, mathematics, science, history, and physics; these priorities are historically linked to farming and heavy manufacturing being at the heart of the community’s economy.

The participant teachers also said that the public school curricula do not develop creativity and encourage critical thinking, which are, as scholars document, achieved through arts programs (Gullatt, 2007; Sternberg, 2006). According to a retired schoolteacher and museum volunteer, Tom, parents in the community school districts will raise money to protect athletic programs when the schools try to cut funding for the programs, but they do not act to recover arts programs. This demonstrates that many community members do not think that arts programs are essential in public school curricula. Stereotypically, arts have been considered something that is extra and that does not need to be taught to all people (Day, 1998; Perrin, 1994). If considering
the fact that these parents and school children are potential Avery visitors, there is a certain population that does not tend to value visual art and therefore would not visit the Avery for visual art experiences, the basis for most museum programs and exhibitions. Lack of arts education leads to a lack of cultural capital that provides a background for understanding and enjoying so-called high culture (Bourdieu, 1984). I develop this concept of cultural capital in greater detail in Chapter Six.

To counteract these shortcomings, provide more balanced educational experiences for children in the region, and emphasize the importance of arts education, like-minded educators in the community have organized a group called the Midwest Arts Education that promotes arts education and programs in the community. I was invited to attend their regular meetings and attended three of them while I was in River City. The group had a nice mix of people: young, old, experienced, and professional. The organization is supported by a statewide, non-profit organization for arts education as well as a number of grants. Its members include not only art teachers but also school principals, school board members, community leaders, gym teachers, music teachers, museum educators, and arts organization leaders. The leader of the group, who is the executive director of the statewide, non-profit institution for arts education, mentioned during one of the meetings that, in schools, math and science related subjects tend to be treated as important but not arts. She believes in changing this view because as all disciplines are equally important. Her stance parallels that of Day (1998) and Perrin (1994). Because of the inequality with which subjects are valued in public schools, the group strives to offer seminars and workshops for local teachers to promote integrative arts lessons and programs. Each member advocates for arts education in his or her own institutions and schools and tries to implement relevant curricula in the River City educational system. The group has also developed a
community-wide theater performance about environmentalism that involves a variety of arts disciplines, such as visual art, music, dance, and literature.

River City is home to more than 10 community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities that serve about 35,000 students in the area and from other regions. A handful of these schools offer programs that are related to visual art and art education, arts and cultural organization management and development, and service and hospitality management.

Three universities and colleges in the area offer degree programs in visual studio art (BFA), design (including computer graphics), and art education. Three schools, including one community college, have entertainment and hospitality management programs including recreation, park, and tourism administration. The Midwestern University, which is located in South City, offers degree programs in Museum Studies and Sports Management, respectively. The university’s Museum Studies program has been affiliated with the Avery since 2008. Most classes take place in the museum’s board meeting room and studios, and the students in the program have internships and manage various hands-on projects in collaboration with museum staff members. Several senior-level museum staff members have taught courses over the past three years.

While these programs are exemplary, the area’s goals to expand service, tourism, and education mean that River City needs more educational programs for people who desire to work in those areas. A local professor, Dave, who teaches Parks and Recreation Services, suggested that tourism, visitor services, and the hospitality industry require a special work outlook, including perspectives and values associated with creativity and flexibility. Dave continued, “Things like hospitality just don’t clock in and clock out like the manufacturing industry” (personal communication, July 11, 2011). Many community members whom I interviewed
reiterated this call for different educational approaches both in public schools and higher education as well as in informal educational sites such as museums.

**Perception of the Midwest**

Several participants mentioned a concept of *Midwest mediocrity*, the attitude presumed to be held by many Midwestern people, which can be summed up as a belief that *we are okay with the way things are*. A number of participants said that people in the community, in general, do not strive to excel and that they tend to blame others for any lack of achievement or success. According to board member and former interim director, Deborah, “The community’s got potential but it acts small. It acts and thinks of itself smaller than it really is, and we don’t gravitate to the positive” (personal communication, July 16, 2011). Former museum director, Ken, who had previously lived in major international cities like London and Paris, remarked, “I think that the general public [in River City] doesn’t know what’s good for itself, if I can say that in a very kind way. I think that there’s a belief that the lowest common denominator is sufficient, and I think that there’s a belief that anything that’s challenging is not acceptable. I think people don’t like change, and I think they don’t like new ideas” (personal communication, June 20, 2011).

One participant suggested that this perception of Midwest mediocrity may be driving ambitious young people away from the community. Many reported the phenomenon of brain drain in the area, noting that brilliant, young students often leave for large cities as soon as they get their college degrees. It could be that young people from the community seek more creative and flexible job opportunities than what they observe to be available in the River City area. River City is still a working class dominant economy and has only recently started to diversify its industries to include service and education. According to Richard Florida (2002), the working
and service classes are paid to execute things according to prepared plans. Unlike working and service classes, people in the creative class are more engaged in complex problem-solving using independent judgment and a high level of human capital (Florida, 2002). Young people in River City might leave town because they cannot find opportunities to use their individual creativity in an area where the dominant industries are farming and heavy manufacturing. Along the same lines, some community members said that arts organizations could help prevent this from happening by providing a variety of creative cultural, leisure, and career opportunities for young people. A local artist and professor, Roy, said that the Avery could be a starting point, although even high school students who receive scholarships through the Avery to go to an art school usually leave town as soon as they have the opportunity.

While the concept of Midwest mediocrity was frequently mentioned by participants who have been part of the community for a long time, it could be an unfounded or even outdated stereotype. It is also important to note that a more relaxed outlook often has very positive results, such as greater mental health, and that it is both natural and beneficial for young people to explore the world. In addition, even though many young people leave River City, they often return after a period of exploration because of its high quality of life and relatively low cost of living.

Discussion

The economy, demographics, arts and cultural offerings, educational opportunities, and other characteristics of a community create its culture and its potential museum audiences. At the same time, community members also influence the community’s economy, culture, and educational scenes. For example, in River City, the farming and heavy industries have attracted people who are equipped to work in the blue-collar sector and technology-related jobs. The
influence of these industries can also be seen in the public school system where science and mathematics are valued more highly than arts disciplines, especially visual arts. Several participants recalled taking a vocational class when they were students in public school system, which focused on metal and woodworking, intended to develop skills for manufacturing jobs. The exclusion of arts programs in public schools is common and sometimes supported by parents, especially when the parents themselves were not exposed to arts programs as children (Day, 1998). This creates a cycle whereby children who were deprived of meaningful arts experiences grow up and become the potential audience of the Avery, but they do not play an active role in arts offerings, thereby leading their own children to be deprived of visual arts as well (Falk & Dierking, 2000; National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). While there has been an increase in the number of arts organizations in the community, visual art is still the least popular art form among community members.

It is obvious that there is a gap in the visual art education of the public school system. The Avery is one of the several informal educational sites that try to fill this gap in the cultural and educational infrastructure of River City by advocating the importance of visual art experiences and education.

In the next chapter, I describe the Avery as an integrated part of the community’s economy, educational infrastructure, and art scenes, and how the museum coevolved with the community.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE AVERY ART MUSEUM

Two days after my arrival in River City in May 2011, I formally met with museum staff members and took a tour of the museum led by the director of museum services, Carol. We had communicated via email prior to my arrival about how to get to the museum and which entrance I should use. That morning, I decided to walk to the museum to meet Carol at 9:00 a.m. I walked down the main street that passes through the chiropractic college, a route that afforded a nice view of downtown Watertown and the Central River. It was a sunny morning, and I saw the sunshine reflecting on sparkling water framed by the beautiful blue sky and two old stone buildings. When I arrived at the museum’s plaza, I saw the main double-sided glass door entrance on the right and a smaller grey metal door on my left. From Carol’s email, I knew that the grey door was the staff entrance that I needed to use.

![Floor Plan](image)

*Figure 5. First level floor plan of the Avery Art Museum.*

When I got closer to the grey door, I noticed a communication station with a white button. I recalled from Carol’s email that I needed to push the button in order to talk to security
and gain access to the building. Soon after I communicated with a security staff member, the door buzzed, and I pulled it open. The door led to the museum’s loading dock and to the security booth enclosed by a glass door and windows. The security staff member asked me to sign in on a sheet and gave me an intern badge that enabled me to get in the building during business hours and to any museum spaces except for the restricted areas such as collection storage and several staff offices. Carol came down to meet with me a minute later. It was our first time meeting each other in person. I immediately sensed her bright energy. She looked mature and professional, wearing colorful business casual clothing—I remember that she had a bright yellow cardigan.

Carol gave me a tour of the museum. We used the door that connected the security booth to the orientation gallery on the first floor. In the orientation gallery, there was a colorful glass multi-sensory sculpture installation. Each glass sculpture looked like a corncob and there were almost 30 of them hanging from the ceiling through black wires. The main colors used were yellow, orange, red, and some purple. There was an image of a cornfield on three walls around the installation, and a video of the artist explaining his art was playing in the right back corner. I immediately connected the artwork to the local economy and landscape. Later, I heard from my landlord that the installation work is his favorite because it is extremely relevant to local audiences.

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5 The loading dock and security booth are not shown in the first level floor plan in Figure 5, but they are located on the right side. There is a secured door that connects the orientation gallery to the security booth and loading dock area.
After viewing the installation piece, Carol and I took the elevator to the fourth floor. Since it was a Monday and the museum was closed, all of the galleries were locked. She used her badge to get into different gallery spaces. The galleries were very clean and sterile and had high ceilings. Most of the walls were white but some sections had colored walls. The overall exhibition design and style were traditionally inspired by the white cube approach explained in the literature review chapter—paintings were installed on solid walls with accompanying interpretive labels and panels. The museum, at the time, had two special exhibitions on the third and fourth floors that were based on collections from a local liberal arts college and a farming equipment manufacturing company (Figure 6), respectively. I thought that incorporating collections from these local institutions was a great way to create and maintain partnerships and to expand exhibition possibilities beyond the museum’s permanent collection. Between the third

Figure 6. Third and fourth level floor plans of the Avery Art Museum.
and fourth floors, there is a space where visitors can take a relaxing break from exploring the galleries while taking in a lovely view of the Central River.

Figure 7. Second level floor plan of the Avery Art Museum.

Carol explained that the museum was storing a collection from a university that is about 70 miles from the Avery because that university’s museum was under construction. Part of the university’s museum collection was on view on the second floor (Figure 7), and most of the artwork featured in the show was European and American modernist art, including works by Max Beckmann, Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Motherwell. Another exhibition on the second floor that drew my attention was the Haitian art show. The paintings in the show were very colorful and different from the rest of the artwork in terms of color, style, and subject. The figures and animals portrayed in the paintings have a child-like quality—for example, one painting depicts a red horse with a pink mane that is sticking out his tongue, and most paintings were not in realistic perspective. As part of the museum’s permanent collection, one gallery on the second floor featured American Regionalist art. Featured artists included Grant Wood, John Bloom, and Thomas Hart Benton. The rest of the exhibitions included Frank Lloyd Wright
architecture and furniture, 20th century American paintings and decorative art, and Spanish Vice-regal paintings. Carol showed me four art-making studios and a family activity center also located on the second floor. The family activity center had a couple of tables and matching sets of chairs, a bean-bag seating area, art materials, books, and boards shaped like refrigerator doors where children can post the artwork they create in the room.

After the tour, Carol and I sat down in the museum’s café to take care of some paperwork. The café is located on the first floor in the southwest corner of the building. When sitting in the café, one can enjoy a pleasant view of the Central River through the large walls of windows that envelop three sides of the café. The café area had some bold red walls with traditional Haitian motifs similar to those that are found in other parts of the museum. The café was bright and spotless with a number of white tables and cleanly designed metal chairs. Each table had a small bottle that contained colorful, artificial flowers. Carol told me the café is usually open for the public use but only serves food when there are rental services, such as weddings and business meetings or on Thursday night when the museum is open until nine for several programs, such as lectures, art talks, and live music performances. Visitors can relax in the café, but during the majority of the time, the only refreshments that the museum offers are coffee from a vending machine in the lobby and chilled bottled water from the museum store.

As we walked out to the lobby area, I was able to see the entire lobby space. Because I had entered through the staff entrance, I had not previously seen the lobby, which is directly connected to the main public entrance. The lobby area—approximately 3,600 square feet—includes two supporting pillars. The floor is made of large shiny black tiles. A large black desk covered almost the entire length of the wall on the south side. On top of the desk was a sign directing visitors to purchase tickets from the museum store located in the northwest corner of
the first floor. There was a seating area in the middle of the lobby that could accommodate about 10 people and a coat room with a number of lockers on the east side.

Carol and I walked up to the second floor where most of the administrative offices are located. Right outside of the office door, we ran into Ed, the chief financial officer (CFO) and acting director. He told me that he was glad to finally meet me in person. We had exchanged a number of emails prior to my arrival. We entered into the office space, which was divided into many cubicles where each staff member worked. There were also two separate closed offices on the right side and one separate office on the left. The CFO, Ed, occupied one of the two offices on the right side, and across from Ed’s office was the executive director’s office overlooking the Central River. Since the museum was looking for a new director at the time, this office was unoccupied. The curator of education, Mary Jane, was assigned to the office on the left side. On the right side of Ed and the executive director’s offices, a board meeting room was located where most staff and board meetings take place.

After showing me the office spaces, Carol took me to the library and showed me the space I would use for the next three months to work and conduct interviews. The actual library has not been open to the public since the museum moved to the current building in 2005. I was assigned to use the common space where visitors are welcome to sit and look at magazines or relax. This common area had a good size black table that could seat about 10 people and a coffee table with art magazines. I used a small desk at one corner with a computer that was connected to the museum’s server; Carol gave me a username and password. Having this space and access made me feel that staff members had a great deal of trust in me despite that fact that they had just met me. That feeling continued throughout and even after completing the data collection for this study. However, I could not disconnect myself from the feeling that I was a stranger to the space.
Staff members were very friendly and tried to make my visit as comfortable as possible. I was able to comfortably and privately interview almost all staff members in my assigned space, away from the distractions of the rest of the museum. During staff meetings, the CFO, Ed, and the director of museum services, Carol, often encouraged other staff members to participate in my research and to help me as much as possible. Most staff members were curious about my study and shared their perspectives and honest opinions with me. I felt that the staff appreciated hearing about my observations when I reported during meetings and at my final presentation. However, several staff members were not sure about how they could contribute to my study and expressed their feelings of being uncomfortable during interviews.

Having described my initial impression of the museum, I will now begin a deeper description of the Avery by incorporating multiple voices and perspectives from participants. These descriptions help readers understand the unique institutional culture of the Avery through understanding its history, mission and goals, and governing and departmental structure. My intent is to use the remainder of this chapter to portray a balanced picture of the Avery. I start with the origin of the museum and how the museum came to be the current Avery Art Museum. I then share how the museum’s mission, vision, and goals have taken shape. I also provide the organizational structure of the museum in order to discuss the governing authority, which includes the director, board members, and various committees, and the roles and relationships of each department and staff member.

**History and Overview of the Museum**

What is now known as the Avery Art Museum was originally established as the Watertown Municipal Art Gallery in 1925, which was developed from the Watertown Art Association established in the late 1800s. The funding source to build the Art Gallery is
unknown but according to one informant, it would have come from the City of Watertown. The Watertown Municipal Art Gallery was located in a remodeled armory building downtown from 1925 until the early 1960s when it moved to a newer and larger facility situated next to the Science Museum, thus forming a small museum campus. The Art Gallery was accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM) in 1983 and changed its name to the Watertown Museum of Art in recognition of its professional standing. In the late 1990s, as part of the downtown Watertown revitalization project, the board of directors and the City of Watertown felt the need to expand the municipal art museum to serve more people and offer more programs and exhibitions. The Avery Charitable Foundation, established by a local family with money mostly earned from the banking business, donated about 13 of the more than 45 million dollars necessary to complete construction. About 20 million dollars came from public funding, including the City of Watertown, and the rest was subsidized by a capital fundraising campaign.

The museum was named after the Avery Foundation, which had made the single largest private donation. Those responsible considered using the name the Avery Art Center instead of the Avery Art Museum to convey to patrons and visitors a more community-oriented emphasis. However, this name was ruled out because deciders felt that the term ‘art museum’ would sound more credible and impressive. The thinking was that potential traditional museum donors would be more willing to write a large check to a “museum” than to a “center.” It was also discussed that being a museum as opposed to a center would be necessary for establishing the Avery’s prestige in the art world.

In 2003, the museum finally became the Avery Art Museum, a private museum with a 501(c)(3) status, and in 2005, it moved to its new building in downtown Watertown. The museum currently sits two miles east and down a hill from its original location. To facilitate the
transition from a municipal art museum to a private non-profit institution, the City of Watertown promised the museum 30% budgetary support (a monthly subsidy of $65,000), which is supposed to end or be reassessed in the year 2024. However, the city is not involved with the museum management. In the summer of 2011, the museum had 16 full-time staff members, 5 part-time visitor services staff members, and approximately 300 volunteers, docents, and interns. It had about 1,200 museum members. Details about staff member composition follow in the Governing Authority, Department, and Staff Structure section below.

The Avery’s founding history is somewhat different from the history of United States art museums discussed in the first section of the literature review chapter. The Avery was established as a municipal art gallery intended to serve the general public rather than to protect and separate elite art and culture from popular culture, the founding purpose of most United States art museums. Perhaps, the gallery was meant to show the power and wealth of the City of Watertown. Even though the Avery changed its mission from more traditional, collection focus to a more education-oriented approach in 2006, the museum was privatized in 2003 with the help of one family that has been known for its wealth and social status in the community for generations. Despite the effort of the Avery to be more community-oriented, community members have felt that the museum does not belong to the community. The name of the museum represents the identity of the museum, and it is difficult for community members to see the Avery as a community-learning site when the name of the museum associates it with the wealth and elitism of the region. Some people may feel that the museum represents the wealth and power of the Avery family not that of the community since it became privatized and obtained a new contemporary-looking building.
Although the physical size of the building is quite large, approximately 120,000 square feet that includes 10 galleries, the relatively small number of staff members and the annual operating budget of two million dollars qualify the Avery as a small- to medium-sized museum. The museum endowment is worth approximately five million dollars. About 20% of the operating budget comes through admission revenues, memberships, store sales, and facility rentals, with the rest coming from fundraising. The education budget is about $60,000 to $70,000, and the curatorial budget is less than $100,000. Approximately 60,000 to 70,000 people visit the museum each year. In 2009, the AAM reaccredited the museum. After the museum was privatized, an admission charge was applied. The current rates are: $7 for an adult, $6 for seniors/students/educators, and $4 for youth 12 and younger. The museum is open to the public for 2,392 hours a year. It is closed on Mondays and national holidays, including Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day.

The Avery’s collection, which has been rather randomly established through gifts and donations from local elites and philanthropies since the museum’s founding, includes American, European, Haitian, Mexican Colonial, and Asian art. A well-known lawyer and former mayor who traveled all over the world and brought art to Watertown donated the first piece to the collection. His collection mainly consisted of American, Northern European, and Mexican Colonial art. In the 1960s, a renowned local doctor donated a substantial Haitian art collection to the museum. The time period represented across the Avery collection spans from the 16th century to the present.

According to interview data, many staff and community members feel that the diversity of the collection could be a weakness. On one hand, many would like to see a greater focus on American Regionalist and Midwestern art, which is considered the most relevant art in the
Midwest and among community members in River City. Many take pride in the depth and number of Regionalist works of art in the collection at the Avery. On the other hand, several local artists and art professors said that they would like to see the museum collecting contemporary art since it is relatively inexpensive to collect compared to older European art, which is what the museum’s associate curator was pursuing for purchase in the summer of 2011. Another reason that some local artists favor contemporary art is that they feel it would be more suitable to the ambience of the new building and galleries than the current collection. However, contemporary art is certainly not universally valued among the community. For example, the contemporary, minimalist look of the building is unappealing to many members of the general public in the region and makes some feel uncomfortable about entering the museum space. The contemporary look of the building is further discussed in Chapter Six.

According to the Avery Art Museum Acquisition Policy adopted in April 2011, the museum plans to build and strengthen the museum’s existing permanent collection through acquisition by gift, bequest, transfer, or purchase of works of art. The six main collecting areas are: 16th through 19th century European; 17th through 19th century Mexican Colonial; 18th to contemporary American; mid-20th century to contemporary Haitian; American Regionalist; 19th and 20th century American Design and Decorative Art. While the museum has a written acquisition policy, at one meeting I observed, members of the acquisition and exhibition committee did not seem to agree on what to purchase to strengthen the museum’s collection. While the museum’s associate curator, Enrika, and the registrar, Ted, wanted to purchase two 16th century European paintings which became available for purchase in New York City, several board members and committee members did not approve of the purchase. The purchase plan was not approved at the meeting.
Because the museum did not adhere to a clear strategy in its initial acquisition process, it continues to struggle to establish a coherent acquisition policy and a collection that can be embraced by the community. The museum’s collection that was developed by its community members over time since its founding in 1925 currently includes approximately 4,000 works of art. Therefore, the museum cannot easily change its collection right now even if some works are not very popular among community members. Some argue that most of the Avery’s collection is not culturally relevant to the local community and that is why some people do not come to see it. However, it is important to note that a piece of art can be interpreted in many different ways by many different types of people, not only those who feel culturally related to it. Many have discovered favorite works of art from well outside their range of cultural experience. In fact, Falk (2009) interestingly notes that people are generally not automatically attracted to exhibitions and programs that are related to their big “I” identities such as ethnic, cultural, or gender identities. Rather, museum visitors tend to be attracted to exhibitions and programs that resonate with their little “i” identities—meaning those that “respond to the needs and realities of the specific moment and situation” (Falk, 2009, p. 73). The cultural diversity of the art in the collection need not be a barrier to increased visitorship.

**Mission, Vision, and Goals**

According to the museum’s website, the mission of the museum is to serve the public by promoting appreciation and creation of visual art through education and by collecting, conserving, and exhibiting art. The mission statement also refers to the importance of the museum in serving as a vital and responsive institution that brings art and people together and benefits the life of the community through the power of art. It is this version revised in 2006 that emphasizes education first and collecting, conserving, and exhibiting art second. The revision
process, which led to the current version, involved local leaders and educators in order to ensure that local voices would be represented. For example, a local English Literature professor participated in drafting the revised statement. The board of directors offered the final approval.

While the museum does not have a vision statement available for public view, the museum’s former director, Ken, composed written strategic plans and a vision statement to satisfy AAM accreditation requirements. According to the museum’s Institutional Plan (see Appendix B), approved by the board of directors in December 2007, the vision of the museum conveys the following: the Avery Art Museum aims to be a museum with a nationally recognized art collection within six years, and to be the premier school of art and art history in the River City region within six years. By that date (i.e., after 2013), the museum aims to be financially stable, with an endowment of at least $20 million. While the vision formulated by Ken includes ambitious and precise plans, it functions more as a statement of six-year goals than as a vision statement. He actually repeats these goals as principle objectives in the museum’s AAM accreditation self-study.

According to John W. Graham and Wendy C. Havlick (1994), the mission and vision statements of organizations in general are very similar in terms of content and purpose in that they describe organizational service, the market, and the means for delivering the service in a way that “reflects the value and priorities of the strategic decision makers” (p. viii). However, P. J. Smit (1999) differentiates mission from vision. According to Smit (1999), while the mission statement conveys “an organization’s character, identity and reason for existence” (p. 128) in the present, vision usually refers to a future state that is better than the current state. Seltzer (2001) describes that the vision statement expresses the organization’s optimal goal, defining the essence of the organization’s beliefs and values while mission describes ways to get to that
optimal goal through identifying service areas, target audience, values, and goals. In Smit and Seltzer’s views, a vision statement is broader than a mission statement and more closely related to the long-term aspirations of the institution. The Smithsonian’s mission and vision statements are excellent examples of this distinction. While the mission statement, “The increase and diffusion of knowledge,” (n.p.) succinctly communicates the institution’s current function, the vision statement, “Shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world” (Smithsonian, n.p.), is broader and explicitly looks forward in time. The Avery’s vision statement is lacking in that it fails to communicate the type of broad timeless goals that characterize a vision. Instead, it puts forth specific goals that will need to be reset in a particular timeframe. There is nothing in the museum’s written goals and strategic plans that satisfy the transcendent, more expansive definition of a vision statement offered by Smit and Seltzer.

The sentiment among a large portion of the staff was that Ken’s vision was not clearly articulated or properly disseminated and that it was overly ambitious. Therefore, when Ken left the organization in November 2010, his vision and strategic plans became invalid and have not been replaced. Staff members felt that Ken’s vision and strategic plans did not represent a collective vision that all staff members agree on. According to Jillian, a committee member, the problem is that the museum is trying to be something for everybody. Statements from other staff members indicate a general agreement that the museum aims to cater to community members and maintain local relevance but lacks the leadership to establish how this can be achieved. Discussion of the Avery’s leadership follows in the next section.
Governing Authority and Department/Staff Structure

The museum’s original organizational chart, which is slightly modified in Figure 8, shows the governing structure, including the staff and departmental organization. As a governing body, the museum has a twenty-one-person board, committees (which are not shown in the chart), and the executive director. The board works with the executive director or interim director to make executive decisions and create strategic plans. The director or interim director serves as a liaison between the board and staff. Currently, the interim director and CFO, Ed, supervises all staff members and oversees financial, operational, and human resources management. Ed was hired shortly after the museum opened its new facility downtown in 2005. He holds a BA in Business and Accounting from a local college. His professional background is in finance and accounting, and he worked in major corporations in the area before attaining his positions at the Avery. When the Avery was privatized, it had to recruit a CFO, a position previously filled by the City of Watertown.

The director reports to the board. The head of each department reports to the director and occasionally works with board and committee members. The security department and catering services are provided by local companies that contract with the museum and are overseen by the director of museum services, Carol, who reports to the director.
**Figure 8.** Avery Art Museum organizational chart.

**The Board**

The board of directors consists of local CEOs and leaders who are economically comfortable and well established in the community. The nominating committee carefully selects potential board members based on the expertise that the museum most needs at the time of nomination. While their roles and degree of participation differ, most board members whom I interviewed agreed that their primary roles as board members are fundraising, policy-making, managing funds, managing the director, and encouraging the community at large to be interested in the Avery. The board as a whole is required to raise $200,000 a year for the museum, and each member’s term is three years, which can be renewed.

The composition of the board of directors is largely homogeneous. There are no people of color, no relatively young (under 40-years-old) people, nor artists. In terms of these characteristics, the board is not representative of the community. However, board members do come from different geographic sections of River City, and bring various essential forms of
expertise to the Avery. For example, more than half of board members have a background in business and currently hold CEO or equivalent positions at corporations in the region. The current board president is the CEO of a local insurance company and another board member is the vice president of a large agricultural machinery corporation. The board also includes attorneys who can assist with the museum’s legal issues such as estates, copyright, and employment. In addition, it includes members with marketing, arts, and medical backgrounds.

So, while the occupational backgrounds of members undoubtedly benefit the museum, it is questionable whether these decision-makers can fully understand the concerns and aspirations of the community as a whole.

Some staff members hold the position that the board does not need to reflect the community to serve it well. In fact, since the community does not have a large group of visual art supporters among the various educational, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds, it may be impossible to identify a truly representative board. The people who regularly patronize and seek leadership positions related to the Avery at this point are mostly White, traditionally educated, and wealthy. Therefore, these qualities characterize most sitting members of the board.

A few members of the board have clear arts-related backgrounds and expertise. For example, Deborah, the former interim director, is the director of the River City Arts Organization. She is the board member with the greatest understanding of how arts museums work and what the museum’s roles are in the community. Two other board members, who are a married couple, are also considered art smart because they have been collecting art for more than 20 years and read art magazines and art history-related books and articles on a regular basis. All other board members whom I interviewed reported that they enjoy and appreciate art but are not experts in art, art history, or arts organizations, specifically.
Many staff members feel that, for a board of 21, having so few members with expertise in the museum industry is unfortunate. One former museum staff member said, “I was often frustrated with board members as consultants because they’re there to set policies and to apply that. However, I was bothered by the fact that they did not understand our industry most of the time” (personal communication, July 15, 2011). He questioned whether board members were in the best position to advocate for the museum when they did not have a full understanding of how an art museum functions and relates to the larger community. Since most board members have full-time jobs and serve the museum on a volunteer basis, they cannot necessarily devote an adequate amount of time to researching how the Avery functions and what each department and staff member is responsible for. The museum education assistant, Rebecca, offered evidence of this problem. She recounted working with a former board member who is a very well-known lawyer in the area. In her words, “We had presented him with an introduction and all the information about exhibitions, programs, and outreach. We walked him through the space and told him all the stuff we do. When he sat down, he talked for 20 minutes about all the things we should be doing, and they were all things that we’re already doing” (Rebecca, personal communication, June 8, 2011).

There is a sense that the management, law, marketing, and fundraising expertise that board members have does not translate perfectly to the particular circumstances of a visual art education organization. For example, one former staff member said that the board of directors made the decision to leave both positions of executive director and senior curator unfilled because they did not understand the Avery’s potential and importance as a major art educational institution in the community. This sentiment is shared by many in the field of museum management who argue that corporate business management styles and principles cannot be
transferred to a museum setting because museums have different ideological, economic, and political values, not to mention that every museum is unique and different in itself (Moore, 1994).

**Committees**

The board consists of various committees whose members are appointed by the president with board approval. While committees can include community members from outside the board, currently the full board and the executive committee do not include anyone who is not a board or museum staff member. The Avery has a number of committees, including the executive, finance, development, education and outreach, acquisition and exhibition, and director search. The executive committee is a subset of the full board and meets on alternate months from full board meetings. Therefore, there are six full board meetings and six executive committee meetings a year. Other committees meet once every two months as well. During the data collection process, I was granted access to all types of board and committee meetings except for the executive and finance committee meetings.

**Development.** The development committee meets with development staff members to discuss fundraising strategies and ways to reduce the museum’s current debts. One development committee meeting that I attended included Reta, the director of development; Allison, the director of marketing and membership; Ed, the CFO and interim director; and Carol, the director of museum services. There was one board member and one outside consultant from a professional consulting firm for capital and endowment campaigns and planned and major gift programs. The consultant shared interesting findings. As the museum’s strengths, he cited its educational programs, collection, building, and its role as a visual art leader. The following were identified as weaknesses: the museum is under staffed, it is financially under budget and carries
facility debt, and it lacks major exhibitions that would attract larger audiences. To remedy these problems, the consultant’s main recommendation was for the museum to undertake a capital campaign to reduce the current debt and increase its endowment by six to eight million dollars by 2016.

After the consultant shared his assessment of the Avery, attendees discussed the new capital campaign proposal recommended by the consultant. Reta, the director of development, explained that the new fundraising approach would be community-driven. This proposed method would rely on staff, board members, volunteers, and community members acting as a team to go out to the community and identify a certain number of people who would be willing to contribute a certain amount of money to the museum each year. Each team would consist of a captain and five to 10 campaigners who would share the goal of raising a certain amount of money by the end of the campaign year. The benefit of the team approach is that it would put less pressure on any individual, particularly the members of the development committee, and would take advantage of a great number of diverse types of connections to community members. Since the museum hired the new director of development, Reta, who has significant experience in fundraising and development for non-profit organizations, there was a general sense of optimism about the museum’s development and financial future.

**Education and outreach.** The education and outreach committee consists of several board members, community members, and education staff. Mary Jane, the curator of education, is the liaison between the committee and museum. At the education and outreach committee meeting that I attended, there were nine people in the room including myself. Committee members emphasized that successful education and outreach practices are critical to achieving the Avery’s mission. One board member pointed out, however, that no clear data or report of

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6 Reta did not continue working at the Avery after a successful annual fundraising campaign for 2011/2012.
educational impact on the community had been shared with community members. Therefore, it can be assumed that most community members are not fully aware of the impact the Avery has on children’s lives through its visual arts education and outreach programs. Deborah, a board member and former interim director, said that while the Avery is well connected to public schools, it has not yet penetrated the community as a whole to the same degree. This conversation led to a question about how the museum lets community members know what it has to offer. The attendees ended the meeting by generating a list of possibly more effective marketing efforts, setting up categories and specific examples of target audiences and coming up with more effective ways to market and advertise with those groups in mind. While the members of this committee had fruitful discussions about how education and outreach could benefit from marketing, the director of marketing and membership, Allison, was unfortunately not present. One of the board members at the meeting later pointed out in a private conversation with me that it was problematic that the director of marketing, Allison, was not present in the meeting that discussed an important aspect of marketing. Allison is not usually part of the education and outreach committee.

**Acquisition and exhibition.** When the museum became privatized and moved to downtown Watertown in 2005, the museum formed an artist advisory committee consisting of local artists and art professors; it lasted for about three years. The role of this committee was to assist curatorial development that highlighted local and regional artists in River City and the Midwest in general. The intent was to ensure that the museum would maintain an intimate connection with local artists and art scenes. When the museum opened its new facilities, the committee played an active role, curating two large shows—a contemporary landscape exhibition and a contemporary glass show. Both exhibitions included many local artists and
artists from the Midwest. However, because of intensive work and internal communication challenges, the committee faded out of existence three years later. The nature of the current acquisition and exhibition committee (A&E committee) is similar to that of the artist advisory committee in that members help make decisions on acquisitions and exhibitions. Unlike the former committee, though, they have no involvement with curatorial processes. The relationships between the museum and local artists have weakened, and current members play a passive role on the committee.

At one A&E meeting I attended, there were 13 people in the room, including several board and community members as well as staff members Enrika, the associate curator, Ted, the registrar, and Ed, the CFO and acting director. Except for two relatively young members, this group was made up entirely of people in their 60s and 70s. Only several committee members including two board members participated in the discussion. Enrika presented two upcoming shows for committee approval even though she had already set up logistical plans for both shows. At the end of the meeting, Enrika and Ted presented two 16th century European paintings that they were considering for purchase. The New York City gallery that was selling the two works sent the original paintings for the museum to consider. All committee members were invited to appreciate the two paintings set up in the empty director’s office.

One member of the A&E committee, Jillian, has been on the museum committee for about two years. According to Jillian, the A&E committee is not very active. In her words, “It’s hardly moved forward. It is sort of retroactively introducing exhibition proposals, so that all members would agree on these. I didn’t feel like she [Enrika, the associate curator] had the back-up documentation even” (Jillian, personal communication, June 8, 2011). She also mentioned that she did not receive any training from the museum about her roles as a committee member.
She commented, “In my entire time on the committee, it’s been very frustrating because I feel like our purpose isn’t quite clear. What can and can’t we do? It’s very odd that we’re called in to vote on these things but we’re only given one option” (Jillian, personal communication, June 8, 2011). She wished for more systematic planning and clearer agendas.

**Director search.** The director search committee is a temporary committee established to recruit and hire a new executive director for the Avery. It consists of several board members and the acting director, the only staff member included. Some staff members said that the committee was not moving forward as quickly as they would like. They reported that the search effort was entirely stalled at one point due to the personal problems of one or two committee members. In the summer of 2011, the search committee narrowed the candidate pool down to four people who came to visit the museum and community and meet with staff members. However, the fact that the executive director position was still advertised online as of January 2012 indicated that the position was still vacant. An email conversation with Ted, the registrar, that took place in January 2012, confirmed that the museum remained director-less at that point. Allison, the director of marketing and membership, said out of desperation that she hopes someone donates an executive director to the museum. She said that board members might not realize how much they need a leader for the museum.

**Leadership**

Since the Avery Art Museum opened its new facility, it has experienced frequent turnover among directors and other staff. There have been two executive directors and three interim directors over the past six years. While the tendency for some staff turnover is found in many non-profit organizations (Peters & Wolfred, 2001), the Avery’s director turnover is more...
frequent than most nonprofit organizations. This has posed a great challenge for the museum and its staff. According to Peters and Wolfred (2001), the average tenure of directors of 1,072 nonprofit organizations of all sizes in California, Texas, Hawaii, and Washington, D.C., is three to five years. Some said that at the Avery the absence of an executive director and the many changes caused by privatization of the museum might have contributed to an unstable museum organizational and leadership structure. According to Marjorie Schwarzer (2002), in general, museum director turnover in the United States is caused by organizational complexity, burnout from stress, too great a workload, and tension among staff, community, board, and donors.

The first director, during and after the privatization of the Avery, guided the transition from the municipal museum to a private museum as well as the construction of the new facility. However, she was fired after the museum opened its new building. According to one staff member, the former director was good at establishing a new institution but was not confident enough to lead and maintain it. After she was let go, one board member at the time filled the director role as the interim director. The former executive director, Ken, was hired in 2007 after 18 months without a director, and he managed the museum for about three and a half years until the end of 2011.

Staff and board members expressed mixed opinions about Ken’s leadership at the Avery. Most people agreed that Ken was an innovative leader and raised the bar of the museum as a community-educational site through collaboration and partnerships with many organizations in the community. For example, a former museum staff, Josh said:

Ken was an unconventional leader. I would be surprised if the next director has as much success as Ken did. He was very aggressive in bringing in partners and collections, very
successful with the local universities and businesses in establishing partnerships.

(personal communication, July 19, 2011)

However, some mentioned that his vision was not clear, and he did not communicate effectively with staff. According to the director of security, Scott, “Ken was trying to please everybody. He’d say yes to both people who are going against each other” (personal communication, June 23, 2011). Despite some dissatisfaction about Ken’s ability to harmoniously manage his staff, the overall consensus is that one of the key contributions of his directorship was for the Avery to take on a more proactive, inviting, friendly posture in relation to the community. Many expressed that they wish he had stayed in the position longer.

Before Ken officially submitted his resignation, the board of directors felt the need to bring someone in from outside the organization to lead the Avery in his absence. They thought that having a leader from outside the museum would minimize bias and emotion in the decision-making process. They recruited Deborah, who was also the director of River City Arts Organization, to be a board member before Ken left. She was subsequently asked to serve as the interim director right after Ken left. Deborah quickly made a number of significant decisions, including revising position responsibilities, eliminating positions, and reducing programming to the point of minimal operation. She said that these changes were necessary until a solution to the budget deficit could be identified and put in place. Deborah said that the decisions were made to allow the museum to survive rather than to propel it to flourish. Deborah served as the interim director of the Avery for about eight months. Since Deborah stepped down, the CFO, Ed, has been serving as the acting director, wearing multiple organizational hats.

According to most staff members, because of the frequent changes in leadership, staff composition (the museum lost two members due to illness within the past couple of years), and
working styles, the museum’s vision and strategic plans have not been clear or stable. Many staff members have felt confused about the museum’s direction. The rate and scale of change have also influenced staff members to resort to focusing simply on getting their own work done—they do not have a clear sense of how their contributions relate to the museum’s function as a whole. As this brief narrative of the history of the directorship shows and as many participants also stated, the Avery did not have a long-term leader who really understood the community and what the Avery had meant and could become to that community.

During Mary Jane’s 20 years as the curator of education, she has worked for three executive directors, including directors before privatization, as well as at least three interim directors. She believes that none demonstrated strong leadership or true love for the community. She continued that no one had a clear vision and, therefore, the museum does not even have a strategic plan that is applicable in the long run. The former senior curator, Jack, agrees that there has not been clear leadership or a strong strategic plan since the museum opened and that the sense of a strategic direction was at its weakest during the 18 director-less months before Ken arrived.

This notion of strategic planning is another concept that overlaps with mission and vision and is closely related to institutional goals. Unlike mission and vision statements that tend to be general, strategic plans describe specific ways to accomplish designated institutional goals. According to Smit (1999), the concept of strategic intent embraces:

an active management process that includes: focusing the organization’s attention on the essence of winning; motivating people by communicating the value of the target; leaving room for individual and team contributions; sustaining enthusiasm by providing new
operational definitions as circumstances change; and using intent consistently to guide resource allocation. (p. 130)

Based on Smit’s definition, strategic intent and planning are processes that all people who work in the institution can participate in through active communication and teamwork in order to achieve institutional goals. In contrast to what Mary Jane implied, a strategic plan need not be defined exclusively by the director’s vision but could be considered a collective planning effort involving the entire staff from all levels. According to the Avery’s Institutional Plan, the museum must have written strategic plans for three areas: collections, education, and finance and development. Since these strategic plans do not seem to be widely embraced among staff, there is an opportunity for them to be further developed and adopted by each staff and department and by the institution as a whole.

However, many staff and board members emphasized the importance of having a strong leader in order to have strong institutional leadership. Deborah commented, “If the Avery had a very strong leader in place, it is my opinion that the board would be a lot more productive than I believe it is” (personal communication, July 16, 2011). Mary Jane mentioned that to gain stronger leadership, hierarchy is somewhat necessary. She did not mean the micromanaging of the staff, but argued that the museum needs some kind of structure, strong direction, target audiences, and applicable strategic plans. Reta, director of development, said that in order to achieve a strong institution, having a strong leader is the first step. Based on her experience working in many non-profit and educational organizations, the leader sets the culture of communication and working styles, directions, and strategic plans.
Staff and Department Structure

While the organizational chart (Figure 8) does not specifically divide museum staff members into departments, according to my observations and interviews, the Avery’s staff members and roles can be divided into six departments: education, curatorial/registration, development/marketing, visitor services, museum services, and facility management.

Education department. Mary Jane, the curator of education, is the longest working full-time staff member and the head of the education department. She holds a bachelor’s degree in painting and master’s degree in art history. She also has background in art museum education. She oversees all public programs and trains docents. She is responsible for inviting speakers and hosting receptions for educational programs. The education department also manages the family activity center and four studios and prepares programs and exhibitions for those spaces. Mary Jane works with and supervises three staff members—Emily, the outreach coordinator; Rebecca, the education assistant; and Joyce, the youth and family programs coordinator.

Emily was hired in 2009 and works mainly on the school outreach program. She goes to public schools to provide visual art lessons for children who may not usually have access to formal visual art education. Emily is from the St. Louis area and holds a master’s degree in art history and has experience in teaching college students.

Rebecca, the education assistant, has a business degree from a local university. She is from the River City area and worked as an event planner before attaining her initial position at the Avery as administrative assistant to the director. Because of her prior experience working with the public and in the public school system, she was soon promoted to the education assistant position. Rebecca helps create and develop programs and takes registrations for workshops and classes. As of summer 2011, she had been at the Avery for five years.
Joyce is the youth and family programs coordinator. She is originally from Michigan and holds a bachelor’s degree in drawing. Before being hired by the Avery, she worked in the early learning department at a local radio station. The summer of 2011 marked her sixth year as an Avery employee. Her main responsibilities include organizing family days and events, school children’s programs, and related tours and programs. Although she usually contracts outside art teachers for children and youth classes, she also occasionally offers her own workshops and art classes for children. She is also responsible for the museum’s after-school outreach program.

While Emily, Rebecca, Joyce, and Mary Jane work together as a team to develop and execute education programs at the Avery, Mary Jane is the primary initiator. She also has the authority to offer final approval of all programs developed by the education department.

Curatorial/registration department. The curatorial/registration department is located on the first floor of the museum along with security staff and facility manager. With no senior curator in place, Enrika, the associate curator, works alone on collections research, exhibition planning, and other curatorial tasks. Enrika is originally from Germany and holds a Ph.D. in art history. She held a curatorial fellow position for a year at another art museum before coming to work with the Avery in 2009. At the time Enrika was hired, the museum had just lost its senior curator due to illness. As a result of these circumstances, Enrika did not receive the usual curatorial training afforded to a new hire. The former director, Ken, hired a part-time senior curator, Jack. Since Jack was also serving as a professor at a college 40 miles from Watertown, he only worked two days a week at the Avery. However, after Ken left the Avery, the board of directors did not renew Jack’s contract. Although Enrika struggled with many changes and challenges in her department, as of the summer of 2011 she was feeling more confident in her work, and other staff were appreciating her contributions.
Ted, the registrar, was hired in 2008 after having worked in the museum field for more than 20 years. He is originally from the Washington, D. C., area where he worked as a museum technician and registrar for many years at the Smithsonian Institution and other nationally recognized museums. Ted’s role at the Avery is to keep track of the museum’s collection, keep it safe, and make travel arrangements for incoming and outgoing artwork. Ted occasionally helps design and install exhibitions as the museum employs only one full-time preparator, Jessica. Jessica works with and reports to Ted in installing exhibitions, but does not usually participate in the exhibition development process. Jessica’s background spans the business, art, and design realms. Before attaining her position at the Avery in 2008, she was an intern in the collections department at another art museum. In her current role, she mainly works on exhibition installation, including applying interpretive labels and panels on the walls. Enrika, Ted, and Jessica share an office space near the museum’s collection storage area, forming the registration/exhibition department. Enrika and Ted report to the director.

**Development/marketing department.** The director of development, Reta, who is from Michigan, was hired at the beginning of 2011. She has significant former experience in financial development and fundraising at educational institutions such as universities. She is charged with overseeing all development efforts at the Avery in collaboration with the CFO and board members from the development committee. Reta reports to the director and supervises two staff members, James and Allison.

James, whose background is in anthropology, management, and construction, started working at the Avery in February 2009. As the director of corporate and foundation relations, his primary role is to write grants to supplement funding for museum exhibitions and programs. He also solicits corporate sponsorships for museum programs and events. His position was newly
created in 2009 when the museum needed a designated person to focus on grant writing. Although James did not have prior experience in either fundraising or development, he has been successful in generating outside financial sources through grants and sponsorships. In the 2010/11 fiscal year, the Avery was awarded about 20 out of 30 grants for which James applied. Allison, who is from the River City region, was hired in July 2005 shortly after the museum opened the new facility. She holds a bachelor’s degree in art history and interior design and a master’s degree in business administration. Allison’s title is the director of marketing and membership, but she also works on special fundraising, membership events planning, and preparation of financial reports. The museum used to utilize an advertising company for their marketing, but Allison is now responsible for almost all marketing, including the museum newsletter, Facebook site, banners, e-blast, press release, and media contacts to arrange print and television advertising. While the education department regularly proposes marketing efforts for its programs, Allison is sometimes involved in modifying and editing their materials before publication. Allison also oversees memberships and annual giving, which generate about $200,000 a year. Because Allison prepares solicitation letters aimed at donors every year and has kept track of the donor database since the museum opened the new building, she has a great deal of knowledge on donor history. She plans non-education, internally executed events, such as member appreciation dinners, the 4th of July Watch Party, the Gala, and other fund-raising events. For the Gala 2011, the museum spent $10,000 to raise $100,000, which is a very successful return.

Visitor services. The visitor services department consists of five part-time staff members, who are supervised by the museum store manager, Julie. Julie, who is from the area, started working at the museum in 1997 as a part-time store manager shortly after graduating
from college. She was promoted to full-time store manager when the new museum building opened to the public in 2005. She is in charge of buying and selling items for the store and managing the inventory. She took on the additional responsibility of managing the visitor services staff at the end of 2010. During weekdays, visitor services staff members work in the store selling admission and memberships as well as helping with the store operation. While visitor services staff occupy the lobby desk during the weekend, there is no desk attendant during the week.

**Museum services.** The director of museum services, Carol, was hired in 2005 and is from the region. She has background in art, education, and business and holds a bachelor’s degree from a local university. She has experience in non-profit organization management. Her first position at the Avery was manager of volunteer and visitor services. Carol currently manages all rental services at the museum and works with the catering manager, Ben, and the director of security, Scott. She serves as the primary liaison between the museum and other contracted companies and assists other museum departments such as development and education. She is also in charge of interns and volunteer management, securing sufficient help for specific events and department needs.

**Facility management.** The facilities manager, Bill, and the facilities assistant, John, who reports to Bill, are in charge of maintaining the museum’s amenities. Bill worked in the construction business for more than 30 years before taking the job at the Avery. He was a field manager for Avery’s new building construction and was asked to manage the building after completion. Bill reports to the director. John has job experience in produce management and construction. He started working at the Avery as a part-time staff member and became full-time a couple of years ago. Bill and John are both from the River City area. Considering the size of the
building (120,000 square feet), according to Bill and John, two facility staff members are not enough to take care of the entire building. Both of them mentioned the difficulty of maintaining the facility with limited human power and funding, but they manage the challenge by prioritizing the most urgent projects and completing them one by one. They occasionally help with installation when Jessica, the only preparator, cannot handle all of the installation work alone. The museum employs a part-time cleaning crew for gallery floors and bathrooms.

**Administrative assistant.** Karen, also from the River City area, was hired in September 2009 as the administrative assistant. Prior to working at the Avery, she worked in the financial industry and at a non-profit organization. She does not report to any specific department, but rather handles any administrative work required by museum staff. Her main efforts involve managing the accounts receivables and payables, including membership fees, admissions, and other museum services revenues. She also schedules and prepares for board and committee meetings and maintains meeting minutes. She is not involved with programming or curatorial development. As an African American, she is the only staff member of color. She reports to the director.

**Discussion**

In this chapter, I detailed the museum’s organizational system, including its governing structure, divisions, and staff roles. My observations and interviews led me to conclude that the museum’s management and organization systems follow the traditional top-down business model, having the governing authority rest with the board of directors and its various committees. While committees have some authority to make decisions and discuss priorities, final decisions are made in board and executive committee meetings, which do not include community members who serve on other committees. Each department is structured in a mini-
hierarchical form, having a head with several subordinate staff members. In addition, major decisions are made at the top by the board members and director and are delivered to the rest of the staff members. For example, as I discussed earlier, the museum was looking for a new executive director, but the search committee did not include any staff members except the CFO, the acting director at the time. During an interview with a former Avery staff member, he told me that he was disappointed to know that the director search committee did not include staff members except for the acting director, feeling that this reflects a lack of trust among board members in the Avery staff. According to Janes (2009), most museums follow a hierarchical business model that allows the director and board of trustees to make most major decisions without significant input from staff members.

The Avery also reflects some characteristics of a mechanical organization structure as discussed in Chapter Two—its control and communication are based on a hierarchical model, decisions are made by people who hold upper-level management positions, and it has different departments, roles, and tasks divided among staff members. However, some said that the organization structure is not as hierarchical as it could be because of the small staff size—16 full-time and five part-time positions, as opposed to larger museums, which employ more than 50 full-time staff members. The museum has only three vertical levels separating the highest and lowest positions if one counts governing authority, department heads, and rest of the staff. According to John Child (1973), larger organizations tend to have more extended hierarchies, more rules and documentation, a greater decentralization of decision-making, and more characteristics of a bureaucratic organization structure.

Overall, the Avery follows a mixed form of organizational and managerial structure that carries both qualities of mechanical and organic models. The established hierarchical
relationships among staff members often become fuzzy in practice as staff members from different positions are frequently invited to share their opinions. For example, the director of development, Reta, stated that the organizational style of the Avery is pretty flat because it has culture where everybody is welcome to pitch in and help each other. It also has organic organization qualities in that it has been flexible in changing its governing structure and funding sources and revising its mission statement to meet the changing needs and interests of the community.

However, understanding the Avery’s organization and managerial styles can be subjective and complex. It is important to note that Reta, who feels that the museum has a flat organization structure, is a new employee who holds a senior-level position. Her perspective on the museum’s organization structure may not represent those of staff members who have lower ranking positions. In fact, several staff members at lower levels of authority expressed concern that their voices are not adequately incorporated into curation and programming processes. Scholars documented the tendency of museum staff members to be dissatisfied with poor communication and a lack of participation in decision-making process in work environments (Farnell, 1984; Kahn & Garden, 1994).

Closely related to the issues of managerial styles and organizational structure is the issue of leadership. The absence of an executive director during the summer of 2011 made it difficult to define the museum’s leadership strategies and styles. What is clear from conversations with staff members, though, is that there is a widespread desire for a leader with a strong vision and presence, who can make the museum more vibrant, active, and responsive to community needs. I did not sense that the Avery as a whole seeks leadership that is either highly authoritative or consultative. Rather, there were mixed opinions. Some staff said that the museum needs a strong
leader who can implement more hierarchy in the museum structure, thus setting a strong vision that can be clearly understood by all staff members. This belief is closely related to leadership trait theories explained in the second part of Chapter Two. Trait theories believe that there are certain qualities that great leaders have and that the success of an organization highly depends on the right selection of the leader (Handy, 1993). Some staff members assume that the future of the Avery only depends on the leader not on a sound work culture or various relationships among staff members; board members; visitors; docents and volunteers; other community members; and surrounding social, cultural, and economic environments. On the other hand, other staff members said that they would prefer a more democratic leading style, such as that displayed by the former executive director, Ken.

Although this was not mentioned, the best leader for the museum may be one who does not fall squarely into either of these camps. For example, some participants suggested that because Ken’s leadership style was too demographic and casual, it confused some staff members about the directions and goals of the museum. Perhaps what the museum needs is a flexible leader who will apply different strategies to suit different situations (Fiedler, 1967; Handy, 1993; Moore, 1994; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). When dealing with dynamic complexity such as leading an organization, systems thinking is a very useful mindset or framework that all involved people can master (Senge, 2006). A problem of an organization or system does not come from one person or one element that is in charge but from all involved people or elements and other interrelated circumstances. A leader can be part of the success or the problem but can never be the sole influence on the entire organization. Therefore, an ideal leader might be one who understands these complex relationships of all involved elements and people and who can help staff members learn to think systemically, learn to work together, and learn to grow for the future
(Senge, 2006). In doing so, an organization becomes a learning community that continues to grow and learns to be better (Senge, 2006).

Recently, the trend in museum leadership is to move away from authoritarian leadership and to move toward more open, participatory, and consultative styles (Moore, 1994). This collective leadership style emphasizes mutual accountability, consensus decision-making, and rotating roles (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985). According to Janes (1999), the collective leadership model that has a group of leaders rather than a lone director at the top of the hierarchy can be a useful model for museums and can extend the opportunity and responsibility of leading to all staff members. As a former director, Janes (1999) led the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Canada, using the collective leadership style in order to respond to challenges due to reduced government funding in the early 1990s and to make the museum a more active and relevant part of the community. For instance, a self-managed team approach allowed staff members to choose leaders of each team, who were rotated every two years in order to keep staff fresh and reduce the sense of hierarchy in each team (Janes, 1999).

While most staff members argued that strong leadership requires a strong leader, inclusive, team-oriented practices can allow sound leadership to derive not only from the governing authority but also from staff members of all levels and positions. Don Yaeger (2011) provides an excellent argument for how effective use of teamwork and collaboration can lead to the achievement of outstanding institutional goals. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal (2008) argue similarly that leadership is not a tangible thing that can be achieved by a lone director but rather should be understood as a “holistic process of mutual influence” (p. 37) that emerges through relationships among all engaged parties. This view is related to Senge’s (2006) concept
of the learning community described above and in Chapter Two: an efficient organization is continuously learning to work together and shifting to be better for the future.

The museum’s staff population and backgrounds also affect the museum’s overall practices. While the staff, board members, and docents are fairly homogenous when it comes to ethnicity, gender, educational level, and socioeconomic status, they are more diverse in terms of career and educational backgrounds and age. More than two-thirds of the full-time staff members are women, all part-time staff members are women, and most docents are retired female teachers. The Avery has only one male docent and two docent members who are people of color. Most staff members are from the Midwest, although several staff members are from other areas of the country and even from other countries. For example, Enrika, the associate curator, is from Germany and one part-time visitor service staff member is from the United Kingdom. Most staff members, with the exception of the facilities manager, Bill; the facilities assistant, John; and the administrative assistant, Karen; have bachelor’s degrees or higher. The curator of education, Mary Jane; the director of development, Reta; the outreach coordinator, Emily; and the director of marketing and membership, Allison, have master’s degrees. The associate curator, Enrika, holds a doctoral degree.

According to Elizabeth E. Merritt (2010), only 20% of museum employees in the United States are members of minority racial groups in spite of the fact that the most recent United States Census (2011) indicates that at least one-third of the total population is composed of racial minorities. Museum board member composition is similarly unrepresentative of the total population (Tucker, 1992). It is important to consider whether this dearth of museum professionals from different ethnic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds is limiting museums from adopting more diverse, inclusive ways of programming and curating. In the words of Eric
Siegel, the director of the New York Hall of Science, “Too many middle aged hyper-educated White people are going to limit the degree to which museums incorporate other points of view” (Merritt, 2010, p. 30). Merritt (2010) acknowledges that the overrepresentation of White women (80%) in museum studies programs creates a major obstacle to diversify museum practices by trying to hire more minority museum professionals. Rather, multiple approaches need to be implemented. Merritt (2010) suggests that museum professionals take the following actions to address the problem: 1) demand and offer more extensive training on how diversity issues affect museum practices and outcomes, 2) recruit more diverse students into museum studies or related programs, and 3) diversify staff through recruiting professionals from non-traditional museum training and arts-related fields. As the Avery’s director of development, Reta, said “The best ideas come when people sit around a table and debate ideas and talk about things. To me that’s when you get the best product. So, if you have people from diverse backgrounds and you talk about how to move the museum forward . . . you are going to come up with better solutions” (personal communication, May 19, 2011).

How a museum is organized and managed inevitably affects its practices, including exhibitions and programs. In the case of the Avery, while some tasks and roles of staff members overlap, the museum’s distinctive division of curatorial and education departments has resulted in insufficient collaboration and communication between the two departments. I discuss the museum’s work culture, communication, and collaboration process in great detail in Chapter Seven.

**Summary and Reflection**

While I devoted Chapters Four and Five to the community and museum, respectively, these two chapters are parts of one story. In Chapter Four, I have described the River City
community’s economy, demographic composition, arts and culture, collaboration with other organizations, and education based on my observations and conversations with staff and community members. In Chapter Five, I have discussed the Avery’s institutional history, mission and vision, and organizational structure. By doing this, I have located the Avery within the context of its potential audiences and surrounding environments and provided a general sense of the unique culture of the community and museum. The contextual description also demonstrates how the River City community and the Avery have coevolved. A brief summary of this process follows.

In the 1950s the Central River attracted many businesses to the River City area as the river provided a major means for transportation at the time, and massive amounts of farmland and appropriate weather provided ideal conditions for the farming industry. Farming also required heavy equipment for mass production, which went hand in hand with the farming machinery industry. Due to changes in the main industry, the community started to diversify its economy through emphasizing education and hospitality. In addition, people in the community began to demand more arts and cultural amenities and informal educational opportunities. As a result, the decades spanning 1970s through the 2000s saw a great increase in arts and cultural organizations. Consequently, the board of directors and the City of Watertown decided to move the museum to the heart of downtown to serve more community members and create a more vibrant downtown area. The new Avery is also a means to attract more people, businesses, and shopping to the downtown area, thus revitalizing the economy.

The fact that most staff members are from the region underscores the notion that the Avery is an integrated part of the community. Because all staff members live in River City (except the registrar who commutes from a city 70 miles from River City) and many grew up in
the region, they love the community and understand it very well. They attended the schools that belong to the River City educational infrastructure and their children attend them now. Even those that were not raised in the region are current residents of River City and regularly take advantage of the amenities of the town. They are consumers and economic participants. The museum’s collection, which was developed by people of the community over time, is now seen, used, and valued by them. Since public money was essential to constructing the museum’s building and amenities, these belong to the community in a financial sense as well, although the name of the museum may instead represent powerful private wealth in the community. Three hundred community members volunteer at the Avery every year in order to help it and their community succeed; they understand that by serving the Avery, they serve the community at large.

Just as the community has served the museum, the museum has increasingly striven to give back. The museum has modified its identify, exhibitions, and programs over the years to expand its target region and develop new audiences. It has consistently demonstrated a sincere intention to positively influence the lives of local people through providing programs, exhibitions, and special events that are influenced by the modified institutional mission, vision, strategic plans, leadership, and teamwork. It has filled a gap in the educational infrastructure of River City and simulated the region’s economy.

While these interconnected relationships have strengthened the role of the museum as an important visual art educational institution in the community, flaws in the organizational structure, communication processes, and work culture of the museum have kept it from reaching its full potential. As outlined above, because the organizational structure and leadership have not been adequately efficient and stable, the culture of the working environment, along with its
communication and collaboration practices have become less efficient. Inadequate collaboration has in turn affected how the museum creates its primary services, exhibitions and programs—the key means by which the museum connects with community members. The result is that museum services are too often experienced as fragmented or irrelevant to the community. Potential diverse audiences are not attracted in full capacity to the Avery. Fundraising suffers as people choose to withhold donations from an institution they do not use or value, which further incapacitates the museum from taking the steps necessary to become more connected or relevant to the community. The connectedness and disconnectedness between the museum and community, especially how the museum’s primary services are related to visitorship and the community’s overall perception of the Avery, are further developed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: PRIMARY MUSEUM SERVICES, COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS, AND VISITORSHIP

As I explained in Chapter Four, the Avery Art Museum is a major visual art educational organization in the community. As the recent revision in its mission statement in 2006 shows (see Chapter Four), the Avery emphasizes the educational role of the museum while maintaining its traditional museum role of collecting, conserving, and researching significant works of art for the public. The Avery’s exhibitions and educational programs, which are primary museum services, provide educational experiences for visitors and share knowledge, messages, and ideas with them. Many museum staff members told me that while collecting, conserving, and researching the collection is an important role of the museum, engaging exhibitions and educational programs bring people in and provide better opportunities for learning and social interactions rather than just looking at paintings and reading labels. The Avery’s visitor demographic survey\(^8\) conducted in spring 2011 confirmed that most people visit the museum during weekends when there are special events such as lectures, gallery talks, and evening events, which demonstrates why there are not many visitors coming to the museum during weekdays when few lectures, programs, and events are provided.

While the museum has been educating adults and children of the community in visual art, the museum has failed to reach out to diverse community members who do not tend to be attracted to the current museum offerings. In addition, there has been a predominant perception about the museum that it is an elitist institution where not all people from the community are

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\(^8\) Students in the Museum Studies program of the Midwestern University collaborated with the Avery staff to conduct a demographic survey of Avery visitors to achieve a greater understanding of who was coming to the museum. Two museum studies students, Sarah and Amy, created the survey questions, and the actual survey was coordinated and conducted by the director of museum services, Carol, museum studies students, and volunteers. At the end of 2011, the analysis of the data prepared by the director of the Museum Studies program, Tina, was shared with the staff and me. The survey was conducted on weekdays, weekends, and during other special events for 30 days. Approximately 430 people, age 18 and older, participated.
welcome. As a result, the museum’s visitors still represent only a certain group of people in the community who tend to be socioeconomically and educationally affluent.

In this chapter, I investigate the Avery’s exhibitions and educational programs and analyze how some programs and exhibitions are more inviting and popular among visitors while some are considered not very engaging, relevant, and even elitist. In the second section of the chapter, I discuss how the museum’s exhibitions, programs, physical spaces, and other related practices have shaped the community’s perceptions of the Avery. I examine why these elements created elitist perceptions of the museum in the community and why they appeal to a certain group of people in the community. While the museum does not know why some people do not use the museum, I describe how the museum is predominantly perceived in the community. These perceptions may suggest why some people do not want to go to the Avery nor feel comfortable visiting it.

**Exhibitions and Programs**

The museum offers a variety of exhibitions and programs. Much of the programming is designed to coordinate with exhibition themes and topics. Other special events and programs relate to annual arts and music festivals around the River City area. The museum has permanent exhibitions showing the museum collection and about 10 changing exhibitions a year. These changing shows include traveling exhibitions from other institutions and collections from local universities and companies. Because of the limited curatorial budget, the associate curator, Enrica, tries to curate thematic exhibitions that use works of art from the museum’s collection and collections from local businesses and universities. The curatorial department, including the registrar, Ted, who helps with curatorial processes occasionally, tries to mount exhibitions that
appeal to local people but this effort is limited by the fact that the museum has no thorough market research information about the art interests of local audiences.

The museum provides typical art museum programs such as docent tours, lectures, and gallery talks, as well as some unique programs: free family days; a downtown walking tour; Thursday evening at the Avery; a scholarship program;\(^9\) and art classes for adults, youths, and children. While the exhibitions and programs are linked together in terms of themes and topics, the process of curating and programming is somewhat disjointed in that the exhibitions are curated by the curatorial department, while programs are developed by the education department without sufficient communication and collaboration between the two departments.

**Exhibitions**

The museum’s approach to exhibitions and galleries is considered traditional. Some participants described presentation of artwork as the “Western way,” in that each piece is displayed on a white wall with an accompanying label. O’Doherty (1986) argues this white cube gallery approach is an ideal space to appreciate work of art because it keeps the social and political context out of the aesthetic qualities of the work. Then, the space becomes part of artwork, transforming context to content; the space is not neutral anymore. While the white cube approach to museum exhibitions is still considered standard practice of most museums, this modern, minimalist approach made many people uncomfortable at the Avery, making people feel that personal knowledge and contexts are not allowed in the gallery space.

Most of the time, exhibitions are not hands-on, that is, physical interaction with artwork is prohibited. In most art museums across the board, visitors are not allowed to touch works of

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\(^9\) This scholarship is funded by a local charitable organization focused on educational and social issues and is managed by the Avery’s education department. Local senior high school students submit applications with their high school transcript, a portfolio, and two letters of recommendations for one-time scholarships of $12,000 that helps them study art, art design, or art education. For 2012, they granted six scholarships to local students.
art due to the requirements for collection conservation, although some art museums offer special collections of touchable works or replicas for blind visitors. The permanent exhibitions can be considered diverse in that they include Hispanic and Haitian arts as well as crafts and furniture exhibits. The most beloved permanent exhibition among general population in River City is the regionalist exhibition, which includes the work of nationally recognized regionalist artists, such as Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Bloom.

**Practical art.** According to my participants, the community enjoys decorative arts and industrial crafts. One visitor from the River City area said that he likes furniture exhibitions because he can relate to the material culture and practical art on a personal level. Another visitor, who is a local public school teacher, told me that she enjoyed the museum’s previously mounted practical art exhibits such as blown glass and woodcarving exhibits. In the summer of 2011, as I described in Chapter Five, the museum had an exhibition of a blown glass installation in the introduction gallery on the first floor, the first gallery seen as visitors enter the display space. Individual pieces of the installation looked like a corncob, a symbol closely related to the economic and natural landscape of the community in and around River City. One visitor told me that the relationship of this installation to the local landscape evoked a sense of ownership among visitors. He said, “I understand how people, most people from the area, would be very turned on by that” (personal communication, May 20, 2011). This installation is a nice visual contemporary interpretation of the industry and landscape of River City.

During the summer of 2011, the museum hosted a traveling exhibition that featured the history and art of chairs in the United States for two centuries, which was prepared by a contemporary art museum in the United States. The exhibition consisted of more than 40 chairs differing in time periods, size, shape, color, and style. The interpretive panels and labels
accompanying the exhibition included information about designers, cultural and social contexts, and art and style movements. Several visitors whom I interviewed appreciated the chair exhibition very much as they were able to connect to the theme of the exhibition on a personal level because they use chairs on a daily basis. While they felt the chairs featured in the show were works of art, chairs were also functioning furniture that has been commonly used in the everyday lives of most people. One visitor told me that the chair exhibition was her favorite among many shows on view in the museum at the time because she felt like she was able to understand aesthetics of the chairs, read labels, and talk about it without feeling that she did not have enough knowledge about the subject matter.

As mentioned earlier, the museum previously mounted exhibitions on woodcarving and quilt work that were considered, by several visitors, staff members, board members, and docents, practical and easily understandable art among community members in River City. The museum’s curator created the woodcarving show from the permanent museum collection in 2009 while the quilt show was a traveling exhibition that was developed by another institution. Traveling exhibitions created by outside organizations tend to be appealing to a wide variety of audiences because these shows are designed to travel to diverse areas of the United States or even to international cities. While these pre-curated exhibitions can guarantee popularity and may attract diverse community members, this could end up being a special show, which is fundamentally different from how the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has approached minority art and culture. Marzio (1991) presented Hispanic art with other Western art exhibitions rather than labeling it special or showing it occasionally. Marzio found a way to locate minority art equally within mainstream western art and culture.
**Community-oriented exhibitions.** The majority of Avery exhibitions utilize the museum’s permanent collection or works contributed by professional artists who are selected and invited by the museum. The museum sometimes shows traveling exhibitions such as the chair show or quilt exhibition (described above) that are prepared by other museums or arts organizations. Occasionally, though, through programs like the young artists exhibition, the museum showcases the artwork of local college or high school students or younger children. Students appreciate the opportunity to exhibit their work at the museum, and the events often attract many parents and family members who would not come to the museum otherwise. In the words of a docent, “I think it [children’s art show] must have a really positive effect because it gets people to the museum who would never come for other reasons” (personal communication, July 12, 2012). A local artist and art professor, Bonnie, echoes this sentiment in saying, “Our students have great pride when they’re in that show [college student show] and that brings in a population that’s pretty sweet, to see all the families coming in with that” (personal communication, July 14, 2011).

In the summer of 2011 the museum had a docent-picked exhibition that was curated by more than 30 museum docents. The each participating docent went through the museum’s permanent collection and chose several pieces to be included in the show. The chosen works of art included not only their favorites but also what they understood to be the visitors’ favorites, information that they gained by leading a number of tours. The show was developed and executed by the curator of education, Mary Jane, in collaboration with an education intern, who was a student in the Museum Studies program. Enrika, the associate curator, did not play a major part in organizing this exhibition. The docents were invited to write their own labels for their selected works, which were subsequently edited by Mary Jane to ensure cohesiveness. Uniting
the contributions from a variety of docents resulted in the labels having a different quality from the rest of the labels in the permanent exhibitions. They were much shorter, easier to understand, and embedded in personal stories. This show included almost no abstract or minimalist art, consisting exclusively of paintings, sculptures, and photographs that could be described as figurative and descriptive. One visitor commented that this docent-curated exhibition was somehow sweeter, softer, and easier.

Soon after moving to its new location, the museum had several exhibitions showing the work of local artists, including two major exhibitions: a contemporary landscape exhibition and a contemporary glass show. Unfortunately, though, the frequency of this type of exhibition has decreased, leaving many local artists feeling excluded from the museum. This change in exhibition approach might be related to the museum’s effort to become a nationally recognized art museum as indicated in the museum’s vision, goals, and strategic plans approved under Ken’s leadership (See Appendix B). In addition, the artist advisory group that highlighted local and regional artists in River City and the Midwest was dissolved in 2008 after three years of assisting curatorial development. The museum store does, however, have a wall dedicated to local artists’ work available for purchase. I do not have specific information about how well these locally created works of art sell. The store also carries locally created jewelry, greeting cards, and needlework. According to a visitor service staff member who frequently works at the museum store, it is common for board members to do Christmas shopping at the museum store. I once saw Enrika shopping at the store. I also purchased a couple of jewelry and artistic items (some were locally produced and some were not) at the store while I was there for three months.

According to my observation, visitors almost always drop by the museum store before they leave the museum, and in fact, it is the first place they visit to get their tickets during
weekdays. However, a visitor staff member told me that community members who are not museum-goers often do not know that the museum has a gift store. In one of the staff meetings that I attended, staff members were considering an option to put up a fist store open sign or some kind of permanent advertisement on the building so people who walk or drive by the museum can know of its existence.

**Exhibition labels.** During interviews with participants, many of them commented on the museum’s labels and didactic panels. Although some found them engaging and informative, many visitors felt that they were too long and difficult to understand. Here is an example from one of the museum’s interpretive labels written as: “Neoclassicists rejected the precious feminine, decadent Rococo style in favor of a return to ancient Greco-Roman ideas, which they perceived as demonstrating such noble attributes as honor, loyalty and intelligence.” This label was part of a special exhibition that is prepared by a local university art gallery. People from many disciplines, including students and professors from Art History and English programs, wrote the labels. While the labels written by people with diverse backgrounds and ages delivered many different voices and messages to the discussion of works of art in the show, some of them were loaded with jargon and difficult concepts. As the example above shows, if a viewer is not familiar with the concepts and styles of Neoclassicist, Rococo style, and Greco-Roman ideas, the whole sentence becomes difficult to understand. There was not any clear description of these three terms in the rest of the label. A docent, Diana, expressed her frustration with the museum’s interpretive labels. In her words, “Every sentence has three or four words in it that nobody knows what it is, including myself, and I think I’ve read quite a bit” (Diana, personal communication, July 27, 2012). She added that the labels are hard to read not only because of the language, but also because they are too long, use a small font, and are single-spaced.
While a number of people complained about the museum’s labels in terms of frequent use of difficult terminology, length, and small font size, some of the labels were well received by visitors. Several visitors whom I interviewed felt that the labels that accompanied the docent-picked show were easy to understand with an appropriate length, usually consist of two to four short sentences. To provide an example of the docent-picked show labels, “The eerie, claustrophobic feeling we have when we look at this painting was created by using basic geometric shapes and a palette of three or four colors. Those simple art elements also make us believe we can smell a musty odor and hear a creaking floor.” This label is based on the docent’s feelings about and response to the painting rather than art historical and aesthetic values of the work of art.

According to Deborah Benton (1979), museum visitors spend 10-20 seconds looking at one work of art while Falk (1982) estimates 1.5 minutes. Considering these findings, it is not surprising that many find most of the museum labels to be too long for a relaxing museum visit. The length of the labels along with the specialized vocabulary related to art history and aesthetics leave some visitors feeling distanced from artwork at the Avery. There might be a disconnection between what visitors want to read and know about a work of art and what curators or label writers want to present about the same work. Most curators are art historians who are trained to discuss art historical and the aesthetic value of works of art or artifacts. It is important to find a balanced label that is intellectually challenging but not difficult to understand. Difficult concepts and terminology can be explained in everyday language. Some people suggested that locating self-guided materials throughout the museum and keeping labels short and succinct would facilitate more enjoyable and informative museum visits.
Programs

Most programs that are offered at the Avery focus on education. The education department is the largest, with four full-time staff members. Despite an operating budget of only $60,000 to $70,000 a year, its programs offer interactive activities that successfully bring many community members into the museum on a regular basis. Programs are mostly initiated by the Curator of Education, Mary Jane, and developed and executed by the education staff members: Joyce, the youth and family programs coordinator; Emily, the outreach coordinator; and Rebecca, the education assistant. While the museum has tried to cater to as many people as possible, offering programs intended to appeal to a variety of ages, as well as cultural groups, some of these efforts have been discontinued. In the past, the museum offered a Halloween event for young college students and had programs designed for specific cultural groups, such as Hispanic and Asian Indian. The museum still offers programs specifically designed to attract college students. However, some of the programs that intended to attract cultural minority populations, which were successful in bringing under-represented cultural groups to the museum, ended up being one-time events without a lasting impact on patronage. Preparing special programs that appeal to specific cultural groups is considered time-consuming and not very cost effective for the museum to continue year after year (Marzio, 1991). Unfortunately, the visitor demographic survey data indicates that the audiences who attended special programs did not return to the museum for more general events and exhibitions. Marzio (1991) suggests museums adopt a more inclusive approach in exhibitions and programming related to minority arts and cultures by including them as equal status exhibitions rather than treating them as special.

Outreach programs. The most popular and well-known museum services are outreach programs for K-12 children. The outreach coordinator, Emily, goes to public schools in the
community to give interactive art lessons, which include art-making and discussions about art using the museum’s collection, laptop, and projector. Her lessons are carefully designed to meet the curriculum requirements of the two states where River City is located. The curriculum requirements not only include visual arts education but also embrace other subject matters, such as mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies. Some of the elementary schools in the community do not have an arts specialist and, therefore, do not provide visual art programs at all. Due to budget cuts, which many schools have experienced over the past couple of years, many schools have eliminated their visual art programs. As a result, for some children, Emily’s interactive art lessons are the only formal visual art experience that they are exposed to in the school.

Emily’s outreach programs include facilitated art discussions and hands-on activities, such as drawing and writing about art. In order for the children to experience authentic works of art, she brings pieces from the actual museum collection in a suitcase specially designed to carry artwork safely. The outreach program, which was developed by a former museum educator, has been in operation for three years. In the first year, Emily’s predecessor saw 7,000 children and the next year when Emily took over the program, 10,000 students took advantage of 20 different programs. In 2011, Emily saw 14,000 students with 34 different programs. In her words, “I’m trying to make museum part of their everyday vocabulary so it’s not just one time off thing for children and their parents” (Emily, personal communication, June 1, 2011).

Joyce, the youth and family programs coordinator, is in charge of two outreach programs. An outreach program, in which the museum participates, is a set of interactive presentations done in collaboration with three other museums in the River City area—the Music Experience Center, the Historical House Museum, and the Botanical Garden. Whoever requests this program is
provided with four one-hour presentations from each institution. The museum also offers art lessons for after-school programs in local K-12 schools. These after-school outreach art activities are designed to supplement the public school curriculum and are inspired by the museum’s permanent collection and special exhibitions. The activities teach students elements and principles of art and design and creative thinking through art discussions and a variety of materials, such as clay and soft pastels. According to a visitor services staff member, Elizabeth, who has volunteered and worked at the museum for more than 25 years, the museum is doing a great job with children and young adults since the new museum facility opened six years ago. She said that she is seeing those children who benefited from the outreach programs coming back to the museum to volunteer or do internships. According to the museum’s fall 2011 newsletter, approximately 17,000 children take advantage of these various school outreach programs a year.

**Family days.** Three or four Saturdays a year, the Avery offers free admission and arts activities for families. These free family days are sponsored by local businesses and a large international company headquartered in River City. Although the Avery would like to have more free family days a year, it is always challenging to find adequate sponsorship for advertising and supplies. Free family days are popular and effective in attracting people who would not otherwise come to the museum. While the museum’s admission is inexpensive relative to comparable museums in large cities, it can become prohibitively expensive when three or four family members are in attendance, adding up to $20 to $30 for a few hours of visitation. In addition, the cost of living in River City is considerably lower than that of other large metropolitan cities. Therefore, family days are a wonderful opportunity for local families and members of the low-income population to enjoy the museum without any financial barriers. One
of the most popular free family days was a train-themed day, when over 800 visitors enjoyed the museum and special family activities over the course of several hours on a Saturday. Emily was very pleased with this level of participation, saying, “Eight hundred people! It was just unbelievable! So the community does respond. And a lot of them are first time visitors and they bring their kids” (personal communication, June 1, 2011). However, other themes have not been as successful, attracting only 50 visitors in one case. Clearly, identifying themes that appeal to families must be a priority if free family day is to have the maximum possible impact.

**Docent tour.** Docent tours can be arranged in advance for groups and are also available on a walk-in basis at two regular times on Thursday and Sunday. Each year, local schools bring their fifth-grade students for a museum tour managed by docents. These students are treated to a pre-tour visit by the docent who comes to their school before the field trip date to provide a brief orientation to what the children will be exposed to during the tour. The schools and teachers greatly appreciate the fact that representatives from the museum actually go out to the community to bring people in.

One docent tour that I found to be particularly engaging is the walking tour of the downtown Watertown area. This tour, which may involve two docents, depending on the size of the group, focuses on educating people about the history of the town and its architectural styles. What distinguishes this program is its expansion of the museum space to the surrounding community and its emphasis on buildings as decorative practical art. When I participated in one of the tours, the other participants were all from the area. They were surprised to know the history of buildings and commerce in River City. Because they cared about and live in the community, conversations were often very detailed, personal, and educational.
I also attended an evening art talk led by a group of docents. This tour included a docent-picked exhibition and another special exhibition about water views curated by the associate curator, Enrika. The talk was personal and comfortable since each docent chose their favorite work and shared why they liked the specific piece. The docents talked about color, artist, composition, feelings, context, background, and showed artists’ portraits or other works that they created. There were more than 30 people at the gallery on the second floor including the presenting docents. Participants were quite interactive and wanted to share their feelings and ideas. It was a pleasant docent tour and somewhat different because I was able to hear many voices in one talk.

Art classes. The museum offers a variety of art classes for children and adults. I volunteered at one of the Friday children’s art classes. The art classes were intensive, having a variety of hands-on lessons packed in one day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There were two classes going on at the same time, and they were divided into age groups. I volunteered for the older children’s group, the elementary school level. The contract instructor was very experienced working with children and prepared diverse art lessons for participating children, covering print-making, drawing, painting, and design. There were three volunteers including me in the class, providing additional help to individual students.

When classes are not in sessions, the museum’s studios are open daily for those who just want to walk in and make art. At least one studio is set up for still life arrangements or other art-making opportunities. The museum provides basic materials such as easels, drawing paper, markers, and crayons. Local universities also use the studio spaces for art classes. These university-offered classes at the museum are not usually open to the public, and the tuition each college student pays per class is approximately $4,000 per semester. Thankfully, the museum
offers a variety of adult art classes and workshops at a more reasonable rate ($40 for members/
$50 for non-members per class), including drawing, watercolor, acrylic, and jewelry making.
Several hundred people a year enjoy these adult classes and workshops.

**Thursday evening at the Avery.** The museum usually closes at 5 p.m. but on Thursdays,
it remains open until 9 p.m. Thursday evening is the only day of the week when the museum
café\(^{10}\) is open to the general public with full dinner and drink services. This evening event also
offers live music performances, docent tours, art talks, lectures, and/or movie viewings. While
the museum’s target audience for these evenings is young professionals, they tend to attract
roughly the same group of board members, retirees, docents, and museum members every week.
However, I saw a few young couples come to the evening events for date nights. The museum
tries to expand the program through more marketing involving social media such as E-blast and
Facebook. However, the program gets approximately 30 devoted fans every week.

**Travel program.** The museum offers travel programs to international destinations, such
as London and Paris, as well as United States cities, like New York City and Kansas City. These
trips, which are only available to museum members, offer guided visits to arts and cultural
institutions and the opportunity to experience different cultures within their native context.
International trips usually last about 10 days and cost up to $4,000 per person without meals and
special admissions. The museum provides a motor couch to transport participants to museums
and historical locations. Participants in this program include museum docents and board
members. The museum arranges the overarching structure and schedule of each trip in
consultation with a local travel agency, but itineraries provide flexibility for individual
exploration of the destination city.

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\(^{10}\) According to Ben, the catering manager, the café is having a difficult time breaking even on Thursdays. This is
why the café is not open for other days except when there are rental services.
Non-art related. The Avery also offers programs less directly related to visual arts and art history. By combining art with something unrelated to traditional art themes, new meanings and styles of art can be discovered. For example, in response to the terrible earthquake in Haiti, the museum staged a charity event for the children of Haiti in collaboration with a national charity group that strives to tackle childhood hunger. Volunteers and staff packed nutritionally balanced meals of dried grains, meat, and vegetables for delivery to the ravaged country. More than 150 volunteers helped to send 17,280 meals to Haiti. In addition, $3,881 was raised for the non-profit group, which aims to prevent child hunger. Many children and people not necessarily interested in the arts participated in the event. Coverage of this event of the local news media resulted in good publicity for the museum. During the event, I volunteered as a drink server at the bar and had the opportunity to talk with some of the charity event volunteers. There were many children who had never been to the museum before and had no idea that the museum has a Haitian art collection. Some adult volunteers informed me that this was their first time volunteering at the Avery and that they were surprised to see how nice the museum and the people who work there were. Although the event was not directly related to art, the fact that Avery has a Haitian art collection established a meaningful connection between the museum and the charity function. The museum aspires to attract more new audiences by planning similar collaborative programs with community organizations such as the ballet, orchestra, or environmental groups.

The museum has other programs such as scholarships for local high school students who pursue a college degree in visual art, birthday events for children, a book club for adults, docent training programs, and art history lectures. Approximately 30,000 or more museum participants take advantage of at least one of the programs.
Discussion

Through talking to visitors about museum exhibitions and programs, I found out that people in the community like to experience something that can be easily understood, something that they can relate to personally. For example, many visitors and staff members responded that they would like to see more Midwestern regionalist art, craft, and sculpture exhibitions that are considered less abstract and more descriptive, figurative, relevant, and practical. While some people appreciated the museum’s interpretive labels, most visitors whom I interviewed found them difficult to understand and heavy with jargon from the art history field. The labels almost prevented some viewers from connecting to artwork on a more personal level. Rather, visitors preferred the labels that accompanied the docent-picked show because the labels were short and easy to understand with personal stories by the docents and less academic terminology. Some art museums have adopted a more casual and engaging approach to label writing in that they are short, easy to understand, and engage visitors. For example, the Cleveland Museum of Art’s labels for its permanent collection consist of three or four sentences without art history jargon. Some of the exhibition labels of the Best Practices in Museum Exhibition Writing (2010) selected by a museum educator group, Museum-Ed, utilize questions, personal stories, and fictional-story-writing approaches to label writing.

Community members tended to respond better to programs and exhibitions that were more interactive and hospitable and happening beyond the walls of the museum building. For example, the museum’s K-12 outreach programs were popular among school children and parents who have children in the public school system in River City. Many participants told me that community members appreciate the fact that the Avery educators go to the public schools to give interactive lessons and expose students to visual art education, which is lacking in the River
City public school system. In addition, schoolteachers appreciate when docents go to their schools and provide a pre-visit orientation to students before their field trip to the museum for a docent tour. Another example is the free family day. Free family days were packed with hands-on activities and projects that families can participate in together. The museum provided snacks and drinks for participating families as well. The environment and setting for free family days were inviting, lively, and comfortable, which counters what most people in the community think of the Avery: that it is a quiet and off-limit space, welcoming only a handful of people from the community. I explain this perception of the Avery among community members in the next section of this chapter.

Community members also responded well to events that are more related to social issues, other types of arts, and social activities rather than programs and events that are solely about visual art, art history, or aesthetic education. For example, the charity event for Haitian children at the museum lobby was well attended by community members, including those who have never been to the museum before. While the purpose of the event was to help Haitian children in need, it successfully drew more than 150 participants and volunteers into the museum building and providing a feeling of hospitality, which may affect the participants’ willingness to come back to the museum with their family members at later times. Another activity that was successful was an outdoor mural-making activity for families that took place in the baseball stadium park less than 10 blocks from the museum. Emily, the outreach coordinator, Rebecca, the education assistant, and two summer interns organized and executed the event. I volunteered at the event as well. We set up a large canvas fabric against a wall and provided a number of bottles of paint and large-scale brushes. Many adults and children participated in creating abstract, casual painting with paint and brushes. We were able to advertise the museum’s upcoming free family day and
other ongoing or upcoming exhibitions and events at the event as well. This event not only allowed the museum to take what it has to offer beyond the walls of the museum but also infused art-making activity as part of an everyday event and family picnic at the baseball stadium. This is also a great way to attract new audiences who have never been to the museum. By hosting the charity event in the art museum and connecting art-making activity at another public leisure event, the Avery was able to expand the meaning and scope of art and art-making beyond narrowly defined visual art, art history, and aesthetic education.

While the Avery has a variety of exhibitions and programs that are the primary means for interacting with its visitors, this does not mean that all community members can take advantage of these various exhibitions and programs, which can only be experienced through participation. Some of the programs and exhibitions only appeal to a certain group of people because many community members think that they need to be educated or have a background in visual art or art history in order to enjoy art museum experiences. According to the museum’s visitor demographic survey, most Avery visitors are White, female, well-educated, and older than the average age of the population of River City. The tendency for art museums to attract more educated, affluent people has been well documented (Falk, 1998; Fleming, 2002; Janes, 2009; Kotler & Kotler, 1998; McClellan, 2003).

Then, there is a disconnection between the museum and a certain community population who never visit the Avery or does not value the museum’s current offerings. For example, most people cannot afford to participate in the travel program that provides tours to international cities and costs approximately $4,000 per person. Although this is a relatively inexpensive way to experience international arts scenes, the program is often criticized for being inaccessible to most people. A number of interviewees pointed out that most people do not have the time or money to
take advantage of such a program. A former staff member went so far as to call the program a misuse of institutional resources since it consumes a great deal of staff time and benefits only a few privileged museum members. While the museum makes revenue from this program, and docents who have participated in the travel program(s) are better prepared to lead tours and discussions at the Avery, it may evoke the feeling that the museum is an elitist social club, not a public resource designed for everybody.

What are other qualities and practices that create this disconnection between the museum and certain groups of people in the community? In the next section, I discuss how the community perceives the Avery, in general, through examining several aspects of the museum, including physical spaces, current museum offerings, the culture of the community, and other interrelated aspects.

**Elitist Perception of the Avery in the Community**

While the museum has been an important part of the community and many people take advantage of its diverse exhibitions, programs, and special events, people in the community have certain perceptions about the Avery that are based on what and how the museum has interacted with visitors and community members. The museum cannot control how people in the community view it, but knowing how it is perceived by the majority of community members will help the museum better attract and communicate with its visitors and potential audiences. I will discuss several reasons for these overarching perceptions that were often discussed by participants, including visitors, board, and staff members.

Almost all participants from the community mentioned that the Avery Art Museum is perceived as an elitist institution. The elitist perception of museums is one of the largest challenges that many art museums face in the United States and even worldwide. Janes (2009)
argues that most world museums still cater to society’s elite, although it could be an unfair accusation at times. Therefore, the notion of museums, especially art museums, being elitist is prevalent in many parts of the world. Even in art museums in New York City, located in one of the most diverse areas of the county, struggle with the elitist perception among community members and artists (Judkis, 2011).

There are many elements that create this elitist notion of the Avery in the community. First of all, the name Avery is often associated with private wealth, the banking business, and elitism in the community. A board member and the director of the Chamber of Commerce in River City, Callie, said, “It [the Avery] still carries the legacy of being very much a club of the highbrow, of the art-loving elite of our community” (personal communication, July 11, 2011). She continued, “It carries the unintended burden of the single biggest investor of the Avery family and having the building named after it” (Callie, personal communication, July 11, 2011).

By talking to residents in diverse parts of the community, specifically middle- and low-income people, who mostly reside in the west part of Watertown, Callie understands that those people knew the Avery family’s history of banking and oftentimes not supporting small businesses. According to Callie, when it was decided to include Avery in the name of the museum, the board of directors and staff did not deeply research or assess how the name of the museum would affect establishing a new brand in the long run. According to Callie, who was a good friend of the director at the time, the board of directors spent hours arguing whether it was going to be a museum or a center, but they never argued about whether it was going to be called the Avery or something else. Therefore, many community members consider the museum as a private asset of the Avery Foundation, and, therefore, have less sense of ownership when compared with other cultural and arts institutions in town. A visitor, Donald, whom I interviewed even said, “I just
came for the appreciation of the art because I have some familiarity with the owner of this particular art museum or the founder of the museum” (personal communication, June 24, 2011). The Avery family is not the owner of the museum or the founder of it. According to a local artist, there was more sense of ownership from the community when the museum was a municipal museum and the city took care of the institution.

Besides the name and original funding source of the museum, there are other factors that lead many community members to feel that the Avery is an elitist, closed institution in spite of its successful outreach and educational programs as well as diverse exhibitions and events. The look of the building is one of them. In addition, this tendency is related to the culture of the community, that is, community members fear visual art and art museums, and as a result they do not support them enough. The museum offerings not being interactive are related to these perceptions as well. I also describe how the Avery is perceived by other museums in the area at the end of this section.

The New Museum Building

The museum is very large, clean, and expansive with a shiny outer appearance and has untouchable paintings and sculptures in galleries with high ceilings and white walls. This creates the perception that visual art is separated from people’s daily lives and strengthens the belief that art is not part of daily life. Although the museum building is made of material that is translucent, the cold and hard looking exterior keeps people from being comfortable visiting the museum.

The board of directors invited many architects from all over the world to submit design ideas, and they eventually chose a world-famous architect and his firm to design the museum’s new building. The architect’s vision was to design a museum building that could be a major catalyst for urban revitalization of the City of Watertown. His intention was to attract diverse
people to the downtown area with the new building while maintaining the traditional outline of
the old city. The completed building looks very different from the surrounding scenery. It is a
simple volumetric block enveloped by translucent green glass surfaces.

Some people find the museum building inviting but many feel that it is cold and
intimidating. For example, a visitor, Donald, told me during the interview, “I think it [the
museum building] is inviting because it’s very shiny, glittering, and I think it’s very attractive”
(personal communication, June 24, 2011). Despite the unpopular aesthetic qualities of the
building, most people in the community tend to agree that the museum building has an
impressive presence and that the Avery, referred to as the “jewel box” of the community, is
becoming the symbol of Watertown and even of River City. Some people even said the building
designed by a world-renown architect provokes the feeling of excellence.

However, the building, which appears as well-refined minimalist artwork, is perceived by
many people unfamiliar with the minimalist style as too contemporary, cold, and intimidating.
The Avery’s building is often associated with such words as “ice cube” and “lifeless cold green
building” by the community. Some non-museum-goers even thought that the museum building
was a parking garage. One of the visitors whom I interviewed felt that the appearance of the
building may actually be keeping visitors from a lower socioeconomic group away, saying, “On
the exterior, it looks very fancy and expensive. I’m somebody from the lower-middle-class . . . I
think for people with lower income, the look of the building can be one of the reasons not to
visit. The reason I hadn’t come here before was because it does look rather expensive outside”
(personal communication, May 27, 2011). A former intern told me that on a radio show about the
Avery building which was broadcast several years ago, she recalled a caller saying something
like “They have this new art museum in downtown. It’s so horrible because it’s so modern” (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Some even said that it is an eyesore.

While I did not have uncomfortable feelings about the museum’s building because of my background visiting various museums in the world, I occasionally felt uncomfortable being in the community and attending museum staff meetings and community events as a stranger to River City. In Chapter Three, I discussed my uncomfortable feelings as an outside researcher in a new environment. There were times when I had to kick myself into the museum. I thought maybe how I felt as a stranger to the community and museum was similar to what many community members feel about the museum’s new building. Sometimes, it takes courage to try new things.

The fact that the building only says “AVERY” in a large font followed by “ART MUSEUM” in a much smaller font does not help attract community members into the museum or identify what the building is for. The outside of the building does not display any information about the museum, such as admission charges, programs, exhibitions, and what kind of amenities that the museum has to offer. The interior of the museum was originally white, sterile, and rigid, which caused discomfort among visitors, according to staff members. It was the architect’s aesthetic vision and conscious decision to keep the interior clean and minimal. More than half of the participants felt that this original aesthetic intention did not quite work with the community. In the effort to add warmth to the gallery space, the staff added more color and furniture to soften the spaces. Staff members still struggle to balance the tension between the original aesthetic of the building and the needs and comfort level of visitors. In addition, many feel that the overall design aesthetic is incongruent with the museum’s permanent collection. As a local artist and professor, Bonnie, described, “It [the museum building] screams for contemporary art” (personal communication, July 14, 2011).
While the lobby area serves as a significant source of rental revenue for the museum, generating even more than admission fees, a number of board members, staff, docents, and community members criticized the lobby space for being too intimidating, overpowering, and sterile. They also criticized the lack of policies to warm up the space. Due to cuts in personnel, there is no longer a position for a greeter to stand in the lobby and collect admission during weekdays. The result is that the large long black desk located in the very back of the lobby has no human face but rather a sign that directs visitors to visit the gift store to purchase tickets. Sometimes visitors misinterpret this sign, thinking that it directs them to “just go to the museum store and buy something.” During my time in the museum, it was not uncommon to find visitors wondering around the lobby area after walking through the main door, looking disoriented.

Currently, weekend greeters have to sit about 60 feet from the entrance, forcing them to raise their voices to be heard by entering visitors. There is some discussion about how the museum could remedy this problem and make other changes to add warmth to the lobby. As Michael, the director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, said, “If I was superman, I’d jerk that counter up and I would move it over close to the front door, and I would somehow make that lobby more warm and welcoming” (Michael, personal communication, August 3, 2011). There is a recently formed temporary committee to change the image of the lobby area at the museum. The committee’s plans include removing the large black desk, providing more seating, installing more works of art, and locating volunteers in the lobby closer to the main entrance using a smaller desk. However, two board members I spoke with disagree with proposed changes to the lobby area, stating that they are contrary to the architect’s original aesthetic vision.

When the idea to construct a new downtown building was conceived in the 1990s, the board members and city developers at the time expected the downtown area to become more...
vibrant and fully developed in the near future; they envisioned a large, spectacular building fitting right in to the bustling town center. Their hopes proved to be too optimistic. There is a general consensus that the new building ended up being too large for its environment. The staff is too small to properly manage the space given the small size of the visual art supporting community. Because the community knows that the city subsidized the construction of the new facility, a lot of people feel that it was unnecessarily over the top and lavish. Some feel resentment towards the whole project, seeing it as a misuse of public money. Now the museum cannot change the location or the physical building and is forced to find sufficient funding to maintain the 120,000 square foot space as well as to maintain operations, curation, and appropriate programming.

**Fear Art—Lack of Cultural Capital**

In relation to the elitist perception of the museum in the community, many participants said that community members are intimidated to walk into an art museum because they think they cannot understand art. A local artist and professor, Roy, said, “Most people in the community feel that they are an idiot in an art museum so they just don’t go” (personal communication, July 13, 2011). He described how most people would think, “Everything I do will be wrong and people will laugh at me” (Roy, personal communication, July 13, 2011). He commented that figuring out ways to demystify visual art and to get rid of the fear that the community members feel about visual art and art museums is very important in order to really encourage frequent museum visits among community members.

This is also closely related to the concept of cultural capital, “a concept associated with Bourdieu, for whom cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status” (Barker, 2004, p.
37). For example, a person who was exposed to more educational opportunities and museum culture as a child tends to have the knowledge and language to talk about high culture and art, which becomes cultural capital that is often associated with the middle- and upper-middle-classes (Bourdieu, 1984). When people lack specialized knowledge of art history and visual culture and a cultivated aesthetic taste (cultural capital), it becomes difficult for them to understand or appreciate museum experiences, especially in art museums that are perceived as an elite culture by many people (Bourdieu, 1984; Schwarzer, 2006). According to Pierre Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital is something that can be inherited from parents and elders within the family from the earliest days of life.

Many participants agreed that most community members fear visual art and are afraid of being wrong or not having enough knowledge in art and art history. When they are not confident going into an art museum or exploring visual art experiences, they will not bring their children to the museum either. A docent, Diana, explained that when she leads a tour, some people are terrified to say things or answer her questions because they are afraid of saying something wrong or stupid. Some would not even answer to very simple questions such as “What colors do you see in this painting?” These are mostly adults; kids are less afraid of making mistakes or taking risks. Some visitors that I interviewed told me that they fear things that they are not familiar with and that they do not want to ask stupid questions when they are not sure about things, so they just do not talk at all. I observed one visitor who looked very uncomfortable looking at paintings, and I interviewed her in one of the galleries. She said that she felt like she did not belong there and did not know what to do in galleries. She was a first-time visitor to any art museum and decided to come down to see the museum because she happened to have a free admission ticket.
A director of the Alternative Theater, Jason, said that because the Avery is a premier art museum in the area and there is a certain stigma attached, certain people in the community are scared away from it as opposed to feeling invited to be a part of it. He told me that an art museum is “the untouchable world” for a particular section of the community in the area. They feel, “What am I supposed to do? Or how am I supposed to behave?” (Jason, personal communication, June 8, 2011). Therefore, people just avoid it altogether.

The museum’s facilities manager, Bill, said that the museum is not used enough by many people in the community because, in his words, “We are not raised on art and all that stuff because this is a blue-collar community” (personal communication, July 21, 2011). He emphasized that he was not taught to go to art museums as a child. He continued, “We were not taught to look at art but if somebody teaches the art, then you have more appreciation, but we were never taught that” (Bill, personal communication, July 21, 2011).

A retired public school teacher and current museum volunteer, Tom, used to work at a school where its students are often from underprivileged families, living only one mile or so away from downtown Watertown. Fifth graders make a trip to the Avery once a year, but they do not tend to come back with their family members even though most students enjoy their initial experience on the museum fieldtrip. Tom emphasized that these families may not have had the opportunity to visit museums or other cultural institutions, so they do not place much value on it. He added that going to a museum for them is a very foreign idea. In his words:

Quite often in these homes curtains are drawn, they are not looking outwards, and they seem to be kind of trapped, happily so, in their own little tiny world. So the idea of expanding out and trying something new is not always comfortable for them. (Tom, personal communication, July 27, 2011)
They seem to stay in their comfort zone, although cultural amenities in the downtown area are only a couple of blocks away.

People who are exposed to museums as children tend to go to museums when they grow up, and they tend to take their kids to museums as well (Falk & Dierking, 2000). According to Falk and Dierking (2000), historically, underrepresented groups of people who are less privileged in socioeconomic and educational opportunities tend to have less experience with museums than the more affluent population. In addition, when one does not have a social network or culture of museum-going, the person is not likely to visit a museum (Ostrower, 2005).

A first time visitor, Lilly, told me, “I grew up in a very, very small town. The closest one [art museum] is probably about two hours away. I don’t paint and draw and, you know, I’m not an artist at all” (personal communication, August 2, 2011). She also added that her family was not into art and she thinks that is why she has never been to an art museum prior to her visit to the Avery. What Bill, Lilly, and Tom describe is that many people in the community did not have enough exposure to educational and cultural opportunities to build cultural capital as a child, and therefore they lack the cultural capacity to appreciate visual culture. They do have cultural capital of their own that might not be considered the kind of cultural capital that they need in art museums in order to understand the museum content.

On the other hand, the Avery also has helped some people in the community build their cultural capital through the museum programs and exhibitions. Frequent museum-goers and their family members have multiple educational opportunities, being exposed to art history knowledge and language to talk about art. In addition, the museum’s school outreach programs offer children opportunities to develop cultural capital that could continue into their adult lives.
cultural capital cannot be obtained overnight, in the long run, through more inclusive practices, the Avery can be a more active part of building the community’s collective cultural capital.

**Small Visual Art Supporting Community**

While many community members enjoy arts activities, visual art seems to be the least appealing form of art in the River City area. For example, not many people come to the Avery during weekdays unless there is a special event such as a free family day. I had a difficult time finding visitors to interview on Tuesday through Friday (the museum closes on Monday). Several participants told me that traditionally the museum did not have a huge wave of visitors, and the museum’s curator of education, Mary Jane, who has worked in the museum for 20 years, confirmed that the visitor number has not increased. Because the community does not have a tradition of supporting visual art, the museum is struggling to attract new visitors, donors, and sponsors. Some people explained that the community has vibrant visual arts scenes and has many local artists, but probably not enough museums and galleries to show and sell their work, which suggests that museums and galleries are not supporting local artists enough.

A local artist and professor, Bonnie, expressed her opinion, “I don’t think there’s a whole lot of understanding about art. There’s not a lot of historical training. I just think, as an artist from this town, it’s a very hard town to sell work and to have people support you. There’s just not the cultural support” (personal communication, July 14, 2011). She thinks that the museum has become more of a rich club since it opened its new facility, and the community cannot jump into something that has a very uncomfortable price tag. Bonnie used metaphors of candy and meat that the Avery is like meat which is very difficult to digest. On the other hand, Watertown has a collective studio and gallery spaces in one building called the Artstown Center, which she described as candy that is easy to pick up and melts in your mouth. The Artstown has a number
of casual exhibitions and sells paintings and practical arts, such as jewelry, bags, and hats, and it
does not require fancy clothes or money to get in. Bonnie thinks “it [the community] needs to
have like a stepping stone between the candy [Artstown Center] and the meat [the Avery]”
(personal communication, July 14, 2011) because community members feel more comfortable in
the Artstown and they cannot just jump into appreciating the Avery. Bonnie suggested, “If it [the
Avery] was more of an art center or smaller museum, I think that’s what the town really needs.
Based on my experience, the Avery is not built for that” (personal communication, July 14,
2011).

According to the museum’s former director of development and current director of
marketing at the Science Museum, Josh, the community does not really appreciate often
considered “high quality” and famous artwork, such as Jackson Pollock or Monet. They would
rather see something that is relevant to the Midwest and their personal lives. They want activities
in which they can feel comfortable participating. Josh remarked, “I think that’s where the
education component is critical, and it has to be taught through [the Avery], and people have to
be invited” (personal communication, July 19, 2011). In the case of the Science Museum,
according to Josh, its programs and exhibitions fit right into public school curriculum standards,
and a lot of the programming presents popular culture that relates to local audiences.

Because the community has a small group of visual arts supporters, the support can be
even more divided among several visual arts organizations in town competing against each other
to get more users and donors. Some even claimed it is difficult to find new members of boards
because the same people who are interested in arts tend to be on several different boards already.
A visitor, Peter, told me that he thinks one of the things that puts a lot of people off from the Avery is that it is hands-off physically and emotionally. He believes that there is this invisible wall, besides the museum’s physical walls, between the museum and community. He thinks that people want to be involved with social activities through arts, and they are not interested in just looking at paintings on the walls anymore. Peter compared museums to churches where people want to believe, behave, and belong to each other. He said that museums can be new churches where people want to believe, behave, and belong to the museum. If community members do not believe what the museum offers is valuable, do not know how to behave comfortably around artwork and other people, and do not feel they belong to the museum, the museum is failing to be a responsive institution in the community. Peter also said, “The Avery might be missing all three Bs [believe, behave, and belong]. The museum tends to cater to expensive audiences in town, not getting the community” (personal communication, May 27, 2011). According to Peter, there is this notion among community members, “Art is not really me and I don’t really connect with it. If I have $7 then I would rather spend it for a bottle of beer than the museum” (personal communication, May 27, 2011). Along the same line, according to Farrell and Medvedeva’s (2010) research, most of their participants do not choose to go to museums for leisure purposes because they think of most museums as “static places (‘places that exhibit things’), didactic places (but not necessarily places where the learning was not fun or engaging), and places where you had to be quiet and stand outside looking in” (p. 25).

The director of the Children’s Museum in River City, Jackie, shared her experience at the Avery where children are not allowed to be noisy and touch anything because the museum exhibits valuable artwork that cannot be replaced. There is a stigma following around the art
museum that it is really quiet. She continued, “I remember going in to the Watertown Museum of Art [the Avery’s former name], and the first thing you saw was the guards. It was like, hmm, okay is everyone watching me as I watch the art or what?” (Jackie, personal communication, July 29, 2011). This was also observed by a recent visitor who left a review on an online website, stating there are always security guards hovering around, which made the person uncomfortable enjoying works of art.

Another visitor, Paul, thinks that the Science Museum is more accessible and has larger attractions for children and families than an art museum because it has the IMAX Theater and hands-on activities. Because of the perception that the Avery has just paintings on the walls, many people have not revisited the museum after being there once when the new building opened in 2005. Some of the visitors did not even know that the museum has other activities and programs to participate in and that it changes exhibitions on a regular basis. For example, a visitor whom I interviewed told me that she has never heard that the museum offers educational programs for children and adults or free events for families. Elizabeth Merritt (2010) argues that museums have to be places where many people want to hang out rather than being places for people to check off on their life list or just destinations for taking their out-of-town guests.

Perception among Arts and Cultural Institutions

According to my interviews with the staff from other museums in the River City area, the Avery is seen as a closed institution by other cultural and educational institutions. While other museums and arts organizations tend to collaborate with each other and have a joint membership programs, the Avery is often treated as something different, closed, and elitist. For example, the Children’s Museum, the Zoo, and the Science Museum have a joint membership together and recommend each other to their visitors. The director of the Children’s Museum, Jackie, told me
that the Avery is not as relevant to the age group they target while the Zoo and Science Museum are for slightly older children so they help each other. When I contacted the director of the Science Museum for an interview, she answered that she did not want to participate in my study because she knows nothing about the Avery. This was the only response I received from her after sending three emails and trying to set up an interview. For me, this highlights the disconnection between the Science Museum and the Avery. The former Avery staff member and current director of marketing at the Science Museum, Josh, thinks, “The Avery and the Science Museum compete probably more than they should” (personal communication, July 19, 2011). According to Josh, the last collaboration that the Avery and Science Museum had was three or four years ago (as of summer of 2011).

Discussion

The elitist perception of the Avery in the community is formalized through many aspects. First of all, the esthetic and physical qualities of the museum building and gallery spaces are not considered inviting and create an emotional barrier or discomfort that prevent community members from visiting freely. Considering the fact that the outer appearance of the museum is the first thing that community members see before they actually come into the museum and experience its services, the building acts as a powerful representation of the museum even though the museum is much more than just a shiny building. The elitist and unpopular aesthetic qualities of the building intensify the fearful feeling toward visual art and art museums among community members, implying that visual art is something that is inaccessible and distanced from everyday lives. Farrell and Medvedeva (2010) also demonstrate in their study that many people feel intimidated and excluded from museum cultures and that they do not think what museums offer is relevant to their personal lives. In addition, many community members think
that they need to be educated in order to understand visual art. As many River City community members shared, most people do not feel that they have sufficient knowledge or background (cultural capital) to understand museum offerings. Considering that only 20% of the River City population has a bachelor’s degree or higher, only a fraction of the population tends to support the museum and be frequent museum visitors. The demographic information of the Avery visitors, which I shared at the end of the first section of the chapter, supports this tendency.

Even if community members come into the museum and experience museum exhibitions and programs, some still feel disconnected from the museum culture because most exhibitions and programs are considered hands-off. The museum has signs, saying “do not touch,” in every gallery rather than a sign of “ask us if you have any questions.” While the museum has interactive programs, lectures, workshops, and events, most museum exhibitions are hands-off. Many visitors wanted to be more actively involved with and participate in exhibitions and programs that are relevant to their lives and the surrounding environments. Families look for something that can be both entertaining and educational for their children and other family members. The elitist and closed perception of the Avery among other arts and cultural organizations in the community echoes what many community members feel about the Avery.

In order to diminish the fear toward visual art and make the museum a more comfortable place, the museum has to let community members know through proper advertising, marketing, and educational programs that all people in the community can experience the Avery. The museum has a written family guide for certain exhibitions, but it may not be sufficient. The museum could provide free educational programs on how to use the museum resources with family members and children without a guide person or
specialized knowledge, which may open up some people’s minds. This also could solve the problems of some people feeling that they do not know what to do in museum galleries.

It is also important to explore ways to find out what the community wants to experience at the museum and why they do not come to the museum. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston conducted intensive visitor studies and surveys and hired a public relations company and a research firm to find out why people in some Houston communities do not visit the museum. This research helped the museum to revise its existing programs to meet the needs and interests of those who were not frequent museum visitors (Schneider, 1998). In addition, staff members at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston collaborated with Houston community members to create exhibitions and programs together that became personally important to participants (Schneider, 1998).

Based on conversations and interviews with participants, I suggested several reasons why some people do not feel comfortable at the museum. However, this is not enough. Continuing visitor and non-visitor studies need to be pursued in order to better accommodate diverse community members and attract new audiences. From my study, community members in River City would like to experience something that is active and relevant to their lives and culture in the Midwest. The Avery can adopt this perspective to create exhibitions and programs. After all, the museum’s mission is to bring art and people together and to benefit the lives of community members through the power of art. The museum world needs to find ways to empower community members so that their voice can be heard and reflected in museum practices at various levels (Lavine & Karp, 1991).
Summary and Reflection

A perspective that all people from the community can experience visual art at the Avery is a minority view. One visitor even said that not many people can understand fine art and that those who do not understand art should not come to the museum. The majority view, as I discussed, is an elitist perception of the Avery among community members and their distanced attitude toward visual art experience in general. The elitist perceptions and elements that influence these perceptions in this section are directly related to the reasons why some people do not go to the Avery. First, the widely held belief that the Avery is for a handful of people who are wealthy and educated, and, second, the culture of the community not promoting and supporting visual art are major reasons for some community members not to use the museum. Some pointed out these elitist perceptions of the Avery are what the community really feels about the Avery, and these perceptions might not be inaccurate. In other words, it is a feeling that the community gets from the Avery’s overall practice. The museum might be creating these perceptions by providing programs and exhibitions that only appeal to the wealthy White population of the community. According to Lavine and Karp (1991), “every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it” (p. 1). This also means that there are always other views and methods to create exhibitions and related programs that can be explored by multiple cultural, socioeconomic, and political perspectives. As one participant said, the museum is not really for everybody if one counts homeless people who live in shelters in the downtown a couple blocks from the museum.

Through museum practice including museum exhibitions and programs, the Avery has been perceived as an elitist institution that does not seem to open to all people in the community. The content of the programs and how exhibitions and educational programs are executed and
introduced to visitors necessarily influence how most community members view the museum in general. Some of the museum’s interpretive labels, travel programs to international cities, and visual art and art historical content of most exhibitions and programs are some of the reasons that the Avery tends to attract only certain groups of people: wealthy and well-educated members of the community and school children. The director of development, Reta, said, “There still is a lot of feeling in the community that the Avery is inaccessible to people and that it’s kind of foreboding that you kind of have to put on a suit and a tie to go in to look at the art” (personal communication, May 19, 2011). She told me that there is real lack of awareness in the community about how much outreach the museum does and how many different people the museum’s programs influence. In her words, “There is still that perception out there that we’re just this museum with art hanging on the walls and that’s it” (Reta, personal communication, May 19, 2011). The director of security, Scott, voiced his opinion, “They [community members] are kind of intimidated by the art museum because they’re thinking it’s just for a bunch of rich, educated people and it’s their own little social club” (personal communication, June 23, 2011).

While the elitist perception could be an unfair accusation, a docent remarked that there always will be an element of elitism associated with the Avery because there always will be people whose cultural priority is not related to visual art. For example, she referred to criticism in the local paper about the City of Watertown putting up sculpture and spending money to beautify the city with art. Some people do not believe that art can enrich people’s lives, and for those with lower incomes, buying food and paying rent could be their priorities.

Jackie, the director of the Children’s Museum, suggested that the Avery has to find ways to deliver the message to the community that the Avery is your museum, it offers fun activities for families and children, and its collection belongs to the community. Farrell and Medvedeva
(2010) also suggested that in order for museums to be more active and relevant places in the community, they need to find ways to be more community-based, informal, and communicative.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE WORK CULTURE OF THE AVERY ART MUSEUM

So far, in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I have discussed how the Avery Art Museum is related to the River City community and how the museum’s exhibitions and programs are connected to perceptions of the museum among community members. On the other hand, Chapter Seven concerns the somewhat disconnected and messy work culture of the Avery. Staff members and surrounding environments create the Avery’s work culture; influencing aspects include communication style and systems, communication challenges, and personal dynamics among staff members. Staff members sometimes described the Avery’s work culture as disconnected and non-collaborative. Work culture affects how the museum staff members work with each other and how they create exhibitions and programs. “The process of choice . . . leads to action” (Simon, 1997, p. 1). In other words, how the Avery staff members communicate and work with each other to make decisions influences how staff members execute exhibitions, programs, and other plans. For example, when staff members are involved with certain initiatives from the outset, and their input is reflected, they are more likely to understand the plan and commit to it with better results (Handy, 1993; Setterberg & Schulman, 1985).

While the Avery partly follows the mechanical communication style that is top-down and uni-directional, described in Chapter Two under the Communication Systems section, the Avery is an organization that is complex, has a complicated work culture, and is continuously changing. In this cultural approach, also described in Chapter Two, communication is an ongoing activity and can be a means to create a more efficient work culture at the Avery.

In order to draw a picture of the Avery’s internal work culture in this chapter, I mainly focus on 1) the museum’s internal communication systems and styles, including
board/committee communication and meetings as well as various staff and department meetings and 2) tensions and dynamic relationships among staff members and departments.

**Internal Communication System**

Internal communication is an important function in organizations, and it plays an essential role in connecting all members of an organization to work together toward maintaining, developing, and achieving institutional goals (Guetzkow, 1965). Whatever structure, management system, or leadership style an organization has, an organization is a cultural and organic place where human beings interact with each other and create a work culture together (Senge, 2006). Therefore, the cornerstone to make an organization work efficient and cohesive is open, informal, interdepartmental, and interdisciplinary communication (Peters & Waterman, 1982). If this happens, different ideas and innovation can flourish; different ideas, perspectives, and innovative thinking among staff members can be shared in a multi-directional way allowing the multiple intelligences of all staff members to flourish. Farnell (1984) said that museums would benefit greatly if they paid more attention to their internal communication system and work culture among museum staff members about policies, strategic plans, developments, and more.

When an organization is large and has closed hierarchies, it tends to have more indirect communication in forms such as memorandum, reports, and mails (Barnard, 1938; Mintzberg, 1979). On the other hand, a small organization with a relatively flat organizational structure tends to have more direct communications through face-to-face meetings (Mintzberg, 1979). The Avery has a small group of staff members and its hierarchy has only two or three layers. Therefore, most of the communication is done in face-to-face meetings, although written meeting summaries and minutes are used for information distribution and staff members use email,
telephone, and casual conversation to communicate with one another. The director of marketing and membership, Allison, said that email is not always an effective way of communication because people tend to skim over and forget about them. However, email is often used to distribute information that needs immediate attention from staff members, such as to summon emergency staff meetings or notify about the cancelation of meetings. Face-to-face meetings are considered the most effective way to accomplish many tasks, although ill-prepared meetings can be time-consuming (Doyle & Straus, 1976). I focus on face-to-face communication of the Avery in this section, such as board and staff meetings that include briefings, reporting, dialogue, brainstorming, and casual conversation.

Meetings are very common organizational communication events, and they are prime vehicles for facilitating mutual adjustment (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001; Mintzberg, 1979). A meeting means “the act of gathering together for a limited period of time for the purpose of communication” (Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001, p. 625). There are different types and purposes of meetings: problem-solving, decision-making, planning, feedforward (status reporting and new information presentations), feedback (reacting and evaluating), and combination meetings (Doyle & Straus, 1976). Most board and staff meetings at the Avery are problem-solving, decision-making, planning, and feedforward while the feedback function is sometimes mixed in with other types of meetings. In discussing each staff meeting, I will use these different meeting types to identify purposes of staff meetings at the Avery.

Discussion of the Avery’s internal communication and work culture is based on information gathered through observations and interviews in the summer of 2011, so it does not represent a year-round pattern. I first present a table of the Avery board and staff meetings.
summarizing frequency, duration, chairperson, functions, tasks, and participants of each meeting held at the Avery (See Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Chairperson</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full board</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>Two hours</td>
<td>The chair of the board</td>
<td>Decision-making Planning</td>
<td>Discuss addressed issues and concerns in committee meetings and other staff meetings, such as exhibitions, acquisition policy, programming, and development strategies (see Appendix C for details of agenda)</td>
<td>15-21 board members (some board members join through conference calls), CFO, Ed; the director of development, Reta; and the administrative assistant, Karen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-staff</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>The CFO and acting director, Ed</td>
<td>Feedforward</td>
<td>Provide staff a brief overview of ongoing or upcoming museum programming, exhibitions, and operations</td>
<td>All full-time staff members and one part-time staff member, Elizabeth who acts as a mentor for other visitor services staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department head</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>The CFO and acting director, Ed</td>
<td>Problem-solving Planning</td>
<td>Converse with each other in order to create a more cohesive set of programming and exhibitions, development strategies, marketing efforts, and other efforts that lead to achieving the mission of the museum</td>
<td>All department heads, including the CFO and acting director, Ed; the director of security, Scott; the facility manager, Bill; the director of museum services, Carol; the director of development, Reta; the curator of education, Mary Jane; the registrar, Ted; and the associate curator, Enrika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>The curator of education, Mary Jane</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Discuss planning, creation, and execution of all educational programs that can</td>
<td>The curator of education, Mary Jane; the outreach coordinator, Enrika</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Meeting Purpose</th>
<th>Meeting Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Improve the museum’s current development efforts, find ways to attract community-based donations, and come up with more effective development strategies that can sustain the museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>The director of development, Reta; the director of marketing and membership, Allison; the director of corporate and foundation relations, James; the director of museum services, Carol; and the CFO and acting director, Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>Develop ways to make the Avery more visible in the community and let community members know what the Avery offers them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Allow staff members who attend the meeting to pay attention to what is going on at the museum two weeks in advance so that programs and events can be as smooth as possible without any conflicts and safety concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>Feedforward</td>
<td>The director of museum services, Carol; the facilities manager, Bill; the director of security, Scott; the catering manager, Ben; and the preparator, Jessica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>An hour</td>
<td>The director of museum services, Carol</td>
<td>Feedforward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The Avery Art Museum’s board and staff meetings.

**Board and Committee Communication**

While every non-profit board has different roles depending on its mission, most would agree that the two major roles are governance and stewardship (Suchy, 2004). Governance is a responsibility carried by board members “to protect the long-term future of the museum and to ensure that it fulfills its obligations to stakeholders” (Suchy, 2004, p. 132). Stewardship means the museum’s right “to manage its business balanced with an obligation to the public” (Suchy, 2004, p. 132). More specifically, non-profit boards bring planning, management, and program expertise to an organization and are often responsible for fundraising, fulfilling the mission, ensuring the quality of management, planning fiscal and legal operations, approving budgets, monitoring overall programs and services, hiring directors, electing new board members, and keeping themselves efficient (Seltzer, 2001). They are not an advisory body but an important governing body. According to Seltzer (2001), the stewardship, leadership, and ability to involve others enable organizations to accomplish their vision and mission. Mintzberg (1979) explains that board members perform their roles and responsibilities through regularly scheduled, permanent board and committee meetings and task force meetings, which are somewhat temporary and ad hoc.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the Avery’s full board meets six times a year. The executive committee is a subset of the full board and meets during alternate months. All committees also meet once every two months and include senior staff members. Community
members who are not on the board are involved with most committees except full board, executive, and finance committee meetings. The museum’s permanent committees are the executive, finance, development, education and outreach, and acquisition and exhibition committees. The museum established special task forces to search for a new director and to improve the appearance of the lobby in the summer of 2011. Committee meetings are set up in a similar manner as board meetings. The functions and composition of different committee meetings are explained in the Committees section in Chapter Five under Governing Authority and Department/Staff Structure.

The full board tends to meet after other committee meetings so that the discussion, concerns, and proposals from other committee meetings can be addressed and decisions made in full board meetings. Karen, the administrative assistant, maintains board and committee meeting minutes on the museum’s server. In this way, the content, discussion, and decisions of each meeting can be shared by staff members and board members who are either not part of certain committees or missed meetings. As explained in Chapter Five, however, board members are volunteers and most of them have full-time jobs. Therefore, it is challenging for board members to get deeply involved with standing meetings, museum practices, and events on a regular basis. However, it is the board’s obligation not only to donate money and fundraise, but also to donate time and energy (Seltzer, 2001).

Communication in board and committee meetings sometimes is less than productive. Because, according to one high ranking staff member, what often happens at these meetings is that they spend too much time getting board members up to speed on what is going on, and therefore discussing goals and strategic plans to move forward falls on the shoulders of staff members at the end of the meeting. Even though there is a prepared meeting agenda for board
members to review before the meeting, the Avery might need more thorough pre-meeting preparation. According to Seltzer (2001), it is essential that the agenda of the board meeting and background information should be shared among board members ahead of the actual meeting and pre-discussed among them through email or phone conversations. In Seltzer’s (2001) words, “If a board finds itself focusing on details rather than major policy issues, something is awry” (p. 59).

There is a communication disconnection and lack of interaction between the board and staff members. Most staff members, except some senior level positions, said that they usually do not communicate and work with board members. In addition, as I discussed in Chapter Five, some senior level staff members mentioned that some of the board members do not understand how the museum functions as a visual art educational institution. In most museums, organizational structure is hierarchical, having the board and executive director as the governing body, while the rest of the staff do not participate in the governing process (Suchy, 2004). Therefore, the Avery’s situation is considered common in the non-profit sector. However, some museums strive to incorporate a collective leadership and governing style that includes all staff members. For example, the former director the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Marzio, encouraged active communication and interaction among trustees and staff members through creating a contract between them based on “commitment to a radical idea: ‘we are all part of governance for the museum’” (Suchy, 2004, p. 133).

This communicational disconnection and lack of interaction between the board and staff members might be related to the reason why most museums and non-profit organizations in Canada and the United States tend to have communicational conflict between their boards and staff members. Most non-profit organization or museum boards are made up of affluent, White
males with business and law backgrounds (Dickenson, 1994; Tucker, 1992). These board members may not sufficiently understand museums’ abstruse educational mission and goals and intangible products (e.g., programming and events) (Dickenson, 1994). While business profitability is measurable by numbers, arts and cultural organizations’ profitability cannot be solely measured in the same manner (Sukel, 1978). In museums, measurement of success and profitability can be based on academically sound exhibitions or engaging programs. Quality is more important than quantity in museum practices. Therefore, at museums in general, most senior level staff members complain that board members are uninformed and uninterested while board members argue that directors and senior level staff members are unrealistic with few management skills (Dickerson, 1994). This disconnection comes from misunderstanding and lack of communication and lack of systems thinking that helps one to understand the complex interrelationships of the matter. It could be that museum staff and board members blame each other for the problem that was created by all involved people and related circumstances. Senge (2006) says “In mastering systems thinking, we give up the assumption that there must be an individual, or individual agent, responsible” (p. 78). Open communication, performance evaluation, and systematic trustee and staff training could help remedy communicational disconnection between the board and museum staff (Seltzer, 2001; Suchy, 2004).

**Internal Staff Meetings**

The museum has a number of staff meetings: all-staff, department head, education, development, marketing, event, security, and exhibition and programming, and summaries of meeting details are found in Table 1. All meetings except the exhibition and programming meeting were regularly scheduled although there were some changes depending on staff situations.
Each department tends to have its own meeting that does not require staff members from other departments to attend; some meetings are more open than others. For example, the education meeting was perceived as closed by other staff members as Reta, the director of development, said, “Right now education still sort of develops their own stuff on their own” (personal communication, May 19, 2011). I was able to sit in only one education meeting while I was allowed to sit in on other staff meetings multiple times. When I asked Mary Jane, the curator of education, if I could attend her education staff meeting, she first responded with the question of how I knew about the meeting, which was not on the schedule. While she let me stay in the meeting, I felt uncomfortable as if I was not invited at all.

The development/marketing department has separate development and marketing meetings but both meetings tend to be more open to staff members from other departments. There was a consensus among several staff members that both development and marketing are very much related to the functions and tasks of other museum departments. I was not able to go to any exhibition and programming meetings as they were all canceled while I was there. However, according to interviews with the staff, members from a variety of departments often attend exhibition and programming meetings.

Event and security meetings fall under museum services department. While events meetings are often well attended, security meetings are mostly like a conversation between Carol, the director of museum services, and Scott, the director of security. Facility management does not have an official meeting that is open to other staff members, but Bill, the facilities manager, and John, the facilities assistant, share what is going on in their department with the rest of the museum staff through all-staff, department head, and event meetings. Since most visitor services staff members are part-time, Julie, the store manager or Elizabeth, a visitor
services member who attends all-staff meetings occasionally, usually fills them in with what is going on in the museum in general through written memos and occasional meetings.

Although the museum does not have a written rule to exclude certain staff members from certain meetings, there is an invisible boundary of who attends what meetings, which is related to the museum’s somewhat hierarchical organization structure. While most people recognize that hierarchies are inevitable in organizations of any size (Handy, 1993) and that they are advantageous in terms of fast decision-making process and having a highly specialized workforce (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985), the trend in the museum management and leadership is to move to open, participatory, and consultative structure (Moore, 1994). According to Janes (2009), a hierarchical business model with a lone director in charge of major decision-making that most museums adopted destroys the link of genuine communication and collaboration.

On one hand, time constraints prevent some staff members from attending meetings. According to Doyle and Straus (1976), most people spend 35 to 50% of their working time in meetings. Attending every staff meeting could use up the staff working time on daily tasks that need to be done in a timely manner. In addition, if there are too many people in a meeting that is scheduled for major decision-making in such matters as finances and legal issues, this would reduce the productivity and efficiency of the process. Perhaps, it would be inappropriate for all staff members to attend board or committee meetings that are not related to their departmental or individual roles. On the other hand, when communication is not active and interdepartmental, limited resources and person power cannot be effectively utilized to achieve this collective goal: the Avery becomes a relevant visual art educational institution for the community, which is also implied in the mission statement of the Avery. For example, two groups, the education department and the rest of the museum, conduct marketing efforts, which could result in
redundancy. In addition, while the education department develops most educational programs, staff members from other departments also come up with programs and event ideas that are not so much related to visual art education but equally valuable, such as programs that are related to environmentalism or charity work. The fact that the museum has two different meetings on programming—the education department meeting and the exhibitions and programming meeting—demonstrates this separation. When a program is not related to visual art education, other departments, such as development/marketing or registration/curatorial, end up owning the program and executing it. One staff member explained that they use the word own to describe when other departments other than the education department develop and execute a program. In addition, several staff members held an ad hoc meeting to discuss education programming that is not approved by the head of the education department.

According to my participants, this somewhat fragmented communication system and redundancy in planning efforts sometimes waste staff time and financial resources. Ed, the CFO and the acting director, said that sometimes each department makes decisions without the benefit of input from other departments. He added that this tendency leads to less successful museum practices and programming. In his words, “It doesn’t allow us to put all the resources behind a certain initiative” (Ed, personal communication, July 13, 2011). Other museums, such as the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston confronted similar problems and solved them by creating an exhibition/education team that included staff members from all museum departments to foster efficient communication and to develop cohesive museum services (Conaty & Carter, 2005; Schneider, 1998).
Tensions and Dynamic Relationships among Staff Members

There has been tension among staff members and departments at the Avery. Due to the lack of consistent leadership and clear communication, each staff member and department has worked on their own without sufficient collaborative teamwork, which has intensified existing tension among staff members and departments at the Avery, in turn, causing more communication confusion and unnecessary contentious politics. Such individual and departmental tensions and conflicts are common in many cultural and educational institutions. In fact, they are inevitable if there is more than one person involved. The former director of development and current marketing director at the Science Museum, Josh, stated that there were struggles in terms of communication caused by individual tensions at the Avery; however, it is not unique to the Avery as he finds these tensions at the Science Museum and other museums through talking to peers at professional conferences. While good ideas may spring from discussions and debates among people who have different perspectives and educational and cultural backgrounds, exacerbated tensions and conflicts could harm the entire institution.

The tension among staff members and departments affects how staff members work as a team, especially in the curatorial and education departments. As I discussed in Chapter Six, according to many staff members, the education department does not frequently collaborate with the curatorial department, including registration, although museum educational programs are heavily focused on exhibition themes. This tendency is found in other art museums because traditionally caring for objects and caring for visitor learning and meaning-making were considered two different roles of museums (Low, 1942; Silverman & O’Neill, 2004).

Different working styles and personalities may have influenced the tension between the education and curatorial departments at the Avery. According to most staff members, some
members of education and curatorial departments refuse to work together and do not even talk to one another. These different working styles and personalities among staff members and internal conflicts caused by them are not addressed enough at the Avery. In addition, these interpersonal issues are not clearly and honestly communicated among the involved individuals, which leads to even more troublesome communication challenges and confusion. Lencioni (2004) argues that these issues should be addressed in staff meetings and discussed honestly among staff members. Most leaders tend to avoid addressing uncomfortable interpersonal issues, but when these are ignored, it becomes more difficult to tackle and the entire organization can be inefficient (Lencioni, 2004).

Some staff members said that it is because of physically divided office spaces with curatorial staff on the first floor and education, development, and other administrative offices on the second floor. According to Thomas J. Allen (1997), the probability for communication decreases as separation distance among staff members and their office spaces become larger. For example, if people are more than 10 meters apart, the probability of communicating at least once a week is only about 8 or 9% as opposed to 25% at 5 meters (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Therefore, staff members do not have many opportunities to talk to each other except when they have staff meetings or converse via email or phone. The museum’s former director, Ken, said that the divided office spaces are one of the major factors that discourage a more effective communication system and collaboration among departments and staff members. Ken mentioned,

It [divided office spaces] is a stupid design. What happens is that the people who are downstairs in the basement [technically the first level] start to develop isolation sickness
and they start to speculate about things and upstairs as well. I mean, I would never separate core staff in such a way. (personal communication, June 20, 2011)

These separate office spaces could be amplifying the existing tensions among staff members and departments, especially between the education and curatorial departments.

The former director, Ken, said most people are not trained to work together, and in order to encourage teamwork at the Avery, staff members need more professional training and need to work at it. In his words:

Working with other people isn’t natural for a lot of people. People are more competitive than collaborative, which I think is unfortunate because I think organizations like museums need teamwork. The issue is that you have to compromise your standards in order to work together for the greater good. (Ken, personal communication, June 20, 2011)

Karen, the administrative assistant, agreed with Ken that staff members work for the same purpose after all, so they have to find ways to work together to accomplish what needs to be done for the Avery.

The outreach coordinator, Emily, suggested that staff members have dialogue on a regular basis not just in meetings. Dialogue is a form of communication that is especially useful in creating new ideas and developing active, creative collaboration (Bohm, 1996).

Communication in meetings can be very brief and superficial, and meetings can become so routine that they are sometimes not taken seriously. Emily believes that having a new director of development, Reta, who is geared to working with other staff members and departments as a team can be a great start for more collaboration and dialogue among staff members and departments. In fact, according to Emily, new dialogue is already happening between
departments since Reta got on board. Emily said that some people do not like to explore new ideas and perspectives so they like to stick with what has worked. However, in her opinion, “Just because it works doesn’t mean you can’t make it better” (Emily, personal communication, June 1, 2011). Cohesive and relevant museum practices that would benefit the Avery can come from collaboration and teamwork among staff members.

The collective work of an organization is like an integrated, endless chain (Lencioni, 2002). When one link of the chain or network is broken, it affects how the rest of the chain functions. An organization is the same way. When a single dysfunction is allowed to flourish, it will influence the rest of the organization and the work culture among involved people (Lencioni, 2002). This concept is closely related to the systems theory or thinking that organizations are like open systems in that all elements of a system affect each other and they are part of larger environments (Senge, 2006). A system is more effective and efficient when it has as many connections and relationships as possible with involved elements. A tapestry shows a clearer picture and is stronger when its connected fibers are all tightly woven. However, creating tighter and intimate relationships takes hard work and collective efforts as a well-made tapestry needs a well-trained set of eyes, hands, and minds of masters. Lencioni (2002) argues that productive teamwork and efficient communication require high levels of discipline and persistence among staff members.

**Summary, Discussion, and Reflection**

According to my participants, the internal communication system and work culture at the Avery have improved over time since the museum became privatized. However, many said that the museum’s communication system and culture could be better and more efficient, while some said the Avery does not have a strong system and pleasant work culture in place. According to
Joyce, youth and family programs coordinator, because of the lack of efficient communication system, it is almost impossible to pass the same message from one end of the room to the other. Because the museum did not have a leader long enough to structure or create an effective communication system, the system is well described as a maze. In her words, “It’s like a game you play with the wooden platform that has holes in different places and you have that ball bearing. That’s sort of what it’s like here. So sometimes it drops and sometimes it gets to the end. That’s the best way I can describe it” (Joyce, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

As far as collaboration goes in close relation to the communication system, the staff members from different departments do not tend to work with each other as a team. Although communication and collaboration within each department are stronger than interdepartmental ones and casual conversations about work among staff members are common, many staff members admitted that they tend to work in their own silos. Silos divide departments and people who are supposed to work together as members of the same team (Lencioni, 2006). Sometimes departmental politics or divisional rivalry creates these silos, making people work against one another (Lencioni, 2006). According to Lencioni (2006), this silo phenomenon is “one of the most frustrating aspects of life in any sizable organization” (p.175).

In addition, there are on-going tensions between the curatorial and education departments. There is always a struggle between education and curatorial departments in museums in general, and the Avery was not an exception. Curators tend to work for accolades of their peers, and their work tends to be very academic. A former staff member sometimes felt that the curators were not interested in caring about the public and that they were presenting a show for their academic peers rather than for the public. The struggles between the two departments sometimes generated resentment among staff members and destruction of professional and
personal relationships. The former staff member said that interdepartmental communication and cooperation, which is critical, did not exist while he was at the Avery. As documented by Silverman and O’Neill (2004), this tendency between curators and educators is not unique to the Avery because traditionally caring for objects and caring for visitor learning and meaning-making were considered two different roles of museums. Traditionally, museums divided roles into several departments, and the educational role of museums was added as an additional department after they established curatorial and registration departments (Low, 1942). Therefore, the educators’ role was considered less important than that of curators caring for collections (Low, 1942; McClellan, 2003).

The registrar, Ted, shared his experience at another museum he worked for before he came to the Avery. In his old job, education and curatorial staff were in one department as a team and all exhibitions were meant to be educational. However, at the Avery, he feels that museum educators are separate from museum curators and other museum professionals. Ted also observed this tendency in the field of museums in general. For example, the AAM, the largest museum association in the United States, has separate subcommittees of different museum professions, such as director, educator, curator, registrar, etc., and provides separate meetings and sessions for those professions at its annual conferences. According to Ted, this divisive culture causes each museum profession to feel more comfortable in their own area of expertise and not to pursue conversations beyond it to gain new perspectives and inside information from other professions.

While divided office spaces were detected as a barrier to free communication and collaboration among staff members, some would not want to talk to one another because of issues related to different personalities and working styles, even if the Avery’s staff members
work in the same office space on the same floor. These interpersonal conflicts and culture of exclusion cannot be addressed and enhanced unless involved staff members all work together to make changes. Making efforts to reverse this culture of isolation would help the entire museum to accomplish its mission and goals. According to Genoways and Ireland (2003), the relationships between museum staff members and their practice as a whole is directly related to the museum’s ability to fulfill its mission. In other words, how staff members and departments work affects how the museum as a whole presents exhibitions and programs that are experienced by visitors. Lencioni (2012) argues that an organization with a lot of communicational and personal conflicts and lack of collaboration could waste resources and time, decrease productivity, and lead to frequent employee turnover. Lencioni (2012) calls this type of organization *inefficient*, and its internal problems necessarily leak beyond the walls of the organization. Likewise, if the museum staff members at the Avery do not efficiently communicate with each other and do not work with other departments as a team, their programs and exhibitions, marketing and development efforts, and other museum outreach strategies and services could end up fragmented and not cohesively related. Therefore, the Avery’s internal communication system and work culture influence how the museum interacts with its visitors, potential audience, and other cultural and educational institutions. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston was able to foster great teamwork among its large staff through cross-departmental workshops and training programs (Schneider, 1998).

The internal communication system of the Avery that is critical in developing the museum’s main services of educational programs, exhibitions, and special events is also transferred to the museum visitors who view the exhibitions and participate in programs. When visitors perceive that museum offerings are not consistent or do not see their feedback reflected
in the museum’s practice, they perceive the disconnection in the museum communication system and work culture. A one-time visitor might not perceive that, but the more the visitors are involved with the museum, the better they will be able to understand the system. For example, many visitors asked for the wireless Internet and an inviting, warm lobby area at the museum. It has been six years (as of summer of 2011) since the museum opened its new building but these requests have not been met. In addition, visitors’ request to open the museum’s library to the public has not happened. In fact, the new library was never open to the public since its new founding in 2005. Museum volunteers and docents who have been involved with the museum for several years know that occasionally things are not communicated well at the museum. Museum Studies program students perceived it as well when their well-intended museum visitor survey project was delayed for several months because of mixed responses from several staff members rather than getting critical feedback and collective approval from all involved staff members. The opposite can be true. When the museum has well-planned exhibitions, programs, or events, visitors will also perceive that and will likely to come back. For example, the free family day is well received by the public and becoming more popular attracting diverse community members who are not frequent museum-goers.

A multidirectional, active, and democratic communicational system allows many staff members to share diverse opinions and perspectives on museum practices. When diverse voices of many staff members are reflected in planning and decision-making processes, the museum’s practices are more likely to be diversified enough to attract a new audience. Since the museum has limited staff members and cannot easily change their cultural, ethnic, and educational backgrounds, the Avery can diversify its practices and create more connections through allowing more active dialogue among staff members. A linear communication system not only hinders
staff participation but also limits potential new ideas that could be developed through active
dialogue among various staff members. For example, Karen, the administrative assistant, who is
usually not part of any curating and programming processes, could provide input on museum
exhibitions and programming as a member of the African American community in River City,
such as what her family would like to experience at the Avery or what discourages them from
visiting the museum.

Organizations function as open systems, and they have unique cultures that distinguish
them from other organizations (Geertz, 1973; Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Senge,
2006). In this chapter, I described the work culture of the museum through examining internal
communication systems and dynamic relationships and tensions among staff members and
departments. The museum’s surrounding community and primary services, which I detailed in
Chapters Four, Five, and Six, are also important in understanding the museum’s organizational
system and culture holistically. The Avery organization is interconnected with many different
factors, including the community, management system, leadership, board, staff, policies,
mission, vision, and museum services; this list can go on and on. Therefore, every single element
of the museum organization is important and has a great part in fulfilling the museum’s mission.

According to Senge (2006), this type of organization that is described as systemic and
cultural is a learning organization, and it evolves in relation to other elements of the museum
organization. In a learning organization, people continually learn how to work and learn together,
expand their capacity, and think in new and creative ways (Senge, 2006). I believe the Avery is a
learning organization that has a unique culture, capable people, and diverse community
connections. It is not a fixed organization but a flexible one that is changing to meet the needs
and interests of the staff and community. While it has many challenges related to work culture
and communication, it can grow to be something better for the future and its staff members can learn to work together as a team because the culture of the museum is flexible, not fixed.

Organizations are complicated and described as ever-changing entities. Moving in positive directions and becoming a more efficient, responsive, and inclusive organization can be achieved through seeing the whole organization and community, maintaining open and passionate attitude for life-long learning, being critical about their own biases and assumptions, building and communicating shared vision, and learning as a team (Senge, 2006). Communication and dialogue are important for maintaining these mindsets because communication creates a collective learning network and sound work culture among involved parties (Senge, 2006).

Communication is an on-going, flexible, and multi-directional activity. Through team-based dialogue and collaboration, all members of an organization can find diverse, creative ways to solve problems and make decisions. In so doing, they can critically evaluate their practices and challenge the very thoughts that caused problems in the first place. Einstein said that a problem will not be solved with the same mindset that caused it (Einstein as cited in Langworthy & Henein, 2009).
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

So far, I have examined the Avery Art Museum in relation to the River City community, and how they are connected with and disconnected from each other. I discussed details of the Avery’s primary services, exhibitions and programs as well as how they attracted a certain group of visitors and helped shape the elitist perception of the museum among community members. I also described the museum’s communication systems and work culture, and how the communication systems and dynamic relationships among staff members and departments are also influenced by organizational structure and shape the museum’s practice in reaching out to diverse community members. In doing so, I portrayed the museum and its community in a holistic manner to give a better understanding of multiple, interwoven relationships among many elements of the Avery and the River City community. In this final chapter, I summarize each previous chapter, present conclusions, and explain how I answered my research questions, introduced in Chapter One, through this case study of the Avery. I also share what I have learned through the process of researching and writing the dissertation and discuss future research directions.

Summary of Chapters

I begin this chapter with a summary of Chapters One through Seven. The summaries are not exhaustive but designed to help readers see a big picture of the dissertation and act as references for readers to go find certain parts in actual chapters.

Chapter One

Chapter One provided an overall introduction to the study. I discussed my theoretical framework of museums as open systems and cultural organizations that influence and are influenced by surrounding contexts, such as all involved people, mission and vision, building,
organizational and communication structure, and unique characteristics of their communities.

Using this theoretical framework, I explored the three research questions introduced in the beginning of Chapter One. 1) How is an art museum connected to its community? 2) How do the museum’s primary services (exhibitions and programs) and practices influence the museum’s visitorship and perceptions among community members? 3) What is the work culture of the Avery, and how does the work culture influence the museum’s overall practice? I also shared a brief description of the research methodology, the ethnographic case study, and the holistic and narrative quality of my study though reviewing three existing ethnographic studies. In addition, I explained my role as an active member researcher at the museum who was not a legitimate member of the museum but was involved partly with the museum’s activities and responsibilities. I also shared my occasional uncomfortable feelings as a stranger to the museum and community.

In Chapter One, I also briefly introduced the case study museum using pseudonyms, the Avery Art Museum, and its community, River City. The Avery is located in Watertown, which is part of the River City metropolitan area in the Midwest. River City, which has a population under 400,000, is considered a blue-collar community with farming and heavy manufacturing as its main industries and 20% of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher. The Avery is a premium art museum in the region. It was originally established as public municipal gallery but became privatized with the help of private money in 2003. Chapters Four and Five include more detailed descriptions and discussions about River City and the Avery.

Chapter One further described why I chose the Avery as my case museum for the study and acknowledged my personal assumptions and biases about the research site and museums in general. I chose the museum as my research site for three reasons. First, I wanted to share a story
of a small- to medium-sized art museum in a Midwestern city that is not well known in the field. Second, I chose the Avery because it is not familiar to me so that I could see it with less assumptions and biases. Lastly, staff members at the museum welcomed an outside researcher to study the museum and felt that my study would be helpful to their museum. While I was relatively free of assumptions and biases about the museum and Midwest, I did have preconceived notions about the Midwest and the people there: that it is a farming community and people there lack passion and creativity. I also had an assumption about ideal museums: in general, that they are community-oriented, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and interests of their communities. In addition, I acknowledged that I had a preconceived notion of a museum theory as a social ecosystem but later adopted more relevant theories specific to organizations, systems theory and cultural approach.

Furthermore, Chapter One discussed the research background grounded in my personal experience and the significance of the study in the fields of museum studies and art education. I shared my experience as a student in Syracuse University’s Museum Studies program and working at various museums where I did not see much diversity in everyday museum practices. I contemplated that the lack of diversity, broadly defined, in the field of museums hindered museum professionals from seeing diverse connections among various elements of museums and their communities and from making their museums more relevant to and inclusive of diverse audiences. I also discussed the intellectual significance of the study in four areas: the significance and concept of learning organizations, the importance of a holistic view of museums and their communities, the value of museums becoming more active and relevant organizations, and the significance of diversity museum practices.
Lastly, Chapter One shared the study’s target audience and goals. While the study is targeted for art museum professionals, it can be used by art educators in general and professionals from various kinds of museums because the theoretical framework of an organization as an open system and cultural place can be applied to any educational institution. The main goal of the study is to help museum professionals and art educators to see and increase the dynamic and diverse connections with the community, its culture, and surrounding environments in their practices. I ended Chapter One with an outline of each chapter.

**Chapter Two**

Chapter Two was devoted to a literature review divided into three sections: a brief history of museum development in the United States, organization management, and community development through diversity practices. The first section discussed a history of art museums beginning as elitist, social institutions that represent the power and wealth of upper-class people and how museums have responded due to changes in community demands and financial resources. Museums are becoming more community-oriented, active, relevant, and responsive to the needs and interests of the community. In addition, the privatization of many museums has made museum professionals pay more attention to management, leadership, and communication systems, which are the main elements of the second section of Chapter Two.

In the second section, I reviewed literature in museum management, both non-profit and for-profit, including organizational and managerial theories, leadership approaches, and communication systems and theories. In doing so, I identified museums in general as hybrid organizations that are not neatly categorized as for-profit, non-profit, public, or private. I also discussed my theoretical framework grounded in humanistic organization literature, especially systems theory and the cultural approach. Because all organizations have a unique culture and
are interconnected to all involved people and circumstances, an organization can be best understood by investigating everyday interactions and the work culture of the organization. Ethnography that is designed to study subtle interactions and the culture of people and organizations is considered one of the best methodologies to study a complex organization. My theoretical framework also values the importance of dialogic communication that is multi-directional, on-going, flexible, and creating new ideas.

The third section of the literature review discussed how other museums have met the needs and interests of community members, built broad constituencies, and broadened their audiences to include diverse groups from the surrounding communities. The third section is divided into four areas: curatorial and programming approaches, exhibitions and programs, staff composition and development, and visitor population and background. At the end I identified several exemplary museums that are considered community-oriented learning centers that have diversified their practices at various levels. Through Chapter Two, in summary, I identified my theoretical lens based on cultural and systems theory in which I see, interpret, and understand the Avery as a systemic and cultural organization in relation to surrounding environments and people. In addition, all discussed literature informed my research and was used to analyze and further discussion in Chapters Four through Eight.

**Chapter Three**

In Chapter Three, I described details of my research methodology, an ethnographic case study, and justified why I chose that specific methodology. Ethnography is often used to study culture and interactions of groups of people and organizations and serves as an excellent tool to study deeper meanings of behaviors and conversations of involved people because a researcher becomes part of the research setting, interacting with participants on a daily basis. Because
ethnography is suited for detailed and in-depth study and is time-consuming, I chose to combine a focused case study with ethnographic inquiry. The first section of Chapter Three discussed details of an ethnographic case study as methodology, which is closely associated with naturalistic research and narrative writing style. Naturalistic inquiry posits that researchers are always part of the research setting and that they observe and understand research setting and participants without manipulation, although their perspectives and actions are always part of the research process. A narrative writing style allowed me to include diverse perspectives and ideas of participants and detailed descriptions of phenomenon, helping me avoid understanding the museum and community from my own assumptions and biases.

In the second section of the chapter, I detailed my approach to and details of data collection and research design and how existing qualitative research literature helped me design and manage my own research. My general approach to data collection and participants is casual and friendly, which provided a positive impression to participants and therefore allowed participants to share their feelings and perspectives more freely. Details of the research design included how I gained access to the museum, gathered and managed data, and analyzed and interpreted them. First of all, my academic connection to the director of the Museum Studies program affiliated with the case study museum helped me get access. I used interviews, observations, journaling, visual means, and walking to gather data. I analyzed and interpreted data through various coding systems and layered analysis, which allowed me to visit the raw data multiple times and to avoid interpretation mistakes.

Lastly, I acknowledged five limitations of the methodology. First, my assumptions and biases described in Chapter One could have acted as limitations to understanding the culture of the museum and community fully. Second, because I was an institutional outsider, participant
behaviors and reactions would have been manipulated when interacting with me. Third, I had a limited time to conduct the study, and my observations are limited to activities that happened during the data collection period. Fourth, the study is limited because it does not generalize in the way of quantitative research, and lastly, perspectives and ideas presented in this study do not represent all members of the museum and community. I ended Chapter Three with my reflections on the complex processes of data collection and analysis.

**Chapters Four and Five**

Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven make up the core of the case study based on the data I collected in the summer of 2011. Chapter Four provided deep descriptions of the River City community in terms of economy, demographics, arts and culture, interactions with other organizations in the community, education, and the perception of the Midwest, while Chapter Five focused on the Avery in relation to its founding history, mission and goals, and governing authority and department structure. I started the chapters with my first impression of the community and museum through the eyes of an outsider. Then, I moved to incorporate diverse perspectives of the museum staff and board members, visitors, and community members in describing the community and museum. Chapters Four and Five are interconnected but I decided to divide them into two chapters because of its length. These two chapters describe the unique culture of the community and museum and how they coevolved.

Chapter Four mainly focused on the River City community, which is the larger social environment and context that encompass the Avery, including its economic, demographic, cultural, and educational characteristics. River City has approximately 150,000 households, and some of the communities in River City were founded in the early 1800s. The region is largely divided by four cities, including Watertown where the Avery is located. Economically, River
City largely depends on farming and heavy manufacturing industries, although its economy expanded to include education and hospitality more recently. Its population is homogeneous, having 80% White, 7% African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, and 2% Asian. Its educational level and job configurations are also not very diverse. Many consider River City to be a blue-collar community.

River City has a number of arts and cultural institutions, including a zoo, a botanical garden, theaters, and museums, which are scattered around the four cities in River City. The number of arts and cultural organizations and arts venues increased in the late 1900s when many heavy manufacturing and farming equipment companies moved out to find less expensive labor and resources. Therefore, the region had to find ways to diversify its economy using arts, education, and tourism. While other forms of arts are popular in River City, visual art is the least popular form of art among community members. The Avery strives to maintain partnerships with local arts organizations and museums in order to diversify its practices and provide an ideal educational site for local colleges and universities.

Because its economy has been associated with farming and heavy manufacturing, its educational infrastructure traditionally did not pay much attention to visual art education; this tendency is still found in the public school system in River City as some schools do not even offer any visual arts programs. Currently, with the economic downturn, visual art education is not valued in public school education. The Avery is one of a few major arts organizations that offer visual arts experiences for local children. Due to the increase in arts organizations in the last 1900s and more job training demands in arts and educational sectors, local colleges and universities have provided several related degree programs, and people in the community demand more opportunities for arts education and job training in that area in general.
In Chapter Five, I focused on the Avery, which is one of the major visual arts educational institutions in River City. I provided a founding history of the museum as well as an overview of the museum. The museum was first founded as a municipal art gallery in 1925, became privatized in 2003, and moved to a new Watertown downtown building in 2005. The Avery was accredited by the AAM in 1983 and reaccredited in 2009. The Avery Charitable Foundation donated 13 of the more than 45 million dollars necessary to complete construction of the new building, and the museum was renamed after the Avery Foundation. While the museum is a private non-profit organization, it receives 30% budgetary support from the City of Watertown.

I also discussed the museum’s mission, vision, and goals, governing authority, and the departmental structure. The mission of the museum is to serve the public by promoting appreciation and creation of visual art through education and by collecting, conserving, and exhibiting art. However, the vision and goals of the museum in the summer of 2011 were not clear because the absence of the executive director. The governing structure of the museum consists of the director, board of trustees, and various committees, and the museum departments include education, curatorial/registration, development/marketing, visitor services, museum services, facility management, and administrative. The museum follows a traditional top-down business model that gives decision-making power to the board and director, which follows a mechanical business model. However, the museum also has organic management qualities as the structure is somewhat flexible and staff input is partially reflected. I also discussed the issues of leadership style and staff composition. Collective and flexible leadership was recommended as it provides more opportunities for diverse staff opinions and perspectives to be included in the major decision-making process and governance. I ended Chapter Five by summarizing how the community and museum have coevolved.
Chapter Six

Chapter Six examined the museum’s primary services, exhibitions and programs, and why some of them are more popular than others among community members. The museum’s programs usually follow the themes of exhibitions but the curatorial and education departments do not work together as a collaborative team. Most museum exhibitions are mounted in a traditional white cube approach and feature works of art from professional artists while some exhibitions are closely related to non-mainstream art, including practical art shows, such as quilt and woodcarving, and community-oriented exhibitions featuring artwork of college, high school, and younger students. The museum’s exhibition labels are considered traditional as well, often discussing historical and esthetic aspects of the artwork. Many visitors found the museum labels difficult to understand.

The museum’s programs include K-12 outreach programs, free family days, docent tours, and art-making classes. The museum offers a Thursday evening event when the museum is open until 9:00 pm with a variety of activities, such as a live music performance, dining, film showings, and lectures. The museum also offers a travel program to international cities and well-known American cities for museum members to experience prestigious art scenes. It has non-art-related programs that are often combined with other forms of art or done in collaboration with other cultural and educational institutions in the community. These programs tend to attract more diverse members from the community and are considered more accessible than programs such as the international travel program or art history lectures.

While the museum’s exhibitions and programs are popular among frequent museum visitors and public school students and parents, these services tend to attract a certain group of people in the community who are well educated and affluent. Some of the services, such as the
travel program, are not considered accessible for most community members. Therefore, they create the elitist perception among some community members.

There are other reasons that community members have elitist perceptions about the museum. Community members feel that the museum is an elitist institution because the museum building looks rather expensive, minimalist, and different from the architecture of the city. Connected to the lack of visual art education in the community, most people in the community feel that they cannot understand art at the museum. They lack cultural capital to understand visual art at the museum so they just avoid going to the art museum altogether. People in the community fear art and they think art at the Avery is not connected to their daily lives. In relation to the lack of cultural capital, the community has few visual art supporters, and visual art is the least popular form of art in River City. They also feel that programs and exhibitions at the Avery are hands-off and not engaging. In addition, other cultural and educational organizations in the community also see the Avery as an elitist and closed institution, which echoes the community’s elitist perceptions about the Avery.

I explained what community members would like to experience at the Avery, which involves more hands-on and interactive activities relevant to the community. While the museum offers a variety of exhibitions and programs that are successful, some community members did not connect to the current museum offerings on a personal level, which made them feel uncomfortable and uninvited to the museum setting. According to the visitor demographic survey, the museum tends to cater to a certain group of people in the community, who are White, older, wealthy, and well educated. The tendency is closely related to how most people in the community perceive the Avery as an elitist institution that is somewhat closed and exclusive.
I suggested that the Avery has to find out why community members do not come to the museum and how these dominant perceptions can be transformed in the minds of most community members through systemic visitor and not-visitor studies.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven discussed the Avery’s internal communication system and dynamic relationships among staff members and departments that create the museum’s work culture. The internal communication system detailed two areas: board and committee communication and internal staff meetings. The board meetings are sometimes ineffective because board members are volunteers and some lack a thorough understanding of the museum industry. There is little interaction between the board and staff members, which may be caused by inefficient communication and collaboration systems. Because of the hierarchical organization structure of the museum, most staff members are not part of the governing and decision-making process and, therefore, are not part of most board meetings. The museum board background suggests that they may not understand the abstruse nature of museum profitability while museum professionals tend to focus too much on the quality of museum work.

The museum has many staff meetings, including all-staff, department head, education, development, marketing, event, security, and exhibition and programming; summaries of the characteristics of each meeting is provided in Table 1. While these different meetings have different functions, there are invisible boundaries in that some meetings are open only to certain people. Education meetings are considered private, which does not allow people from other departments to join. This practice hinders interdepartmental collaboration that could lead to more diverse and successful programming and exhibitions. I suggested that systems thinking can be
helpful for a more holistic view of the museum that allows involvement and inclusion of diverse opinions and perspectives of all staff members.

Individual and departmental tensions exist among staff members, which may be caused by divided office spaces and different working styles and personalities. In particular, curatorial and education departments do not collaborate with each other on exhibitions and programs even though they are closely related in themes. More teamwork and collective management style are suggested. While the Avery is a complex and dynamic organization that cannot be easily understood by the eyes of an outsider and seems to have many challenges, it can be a learning organization that transitions into something that is better and growing. Becoming a learning organization also means to learn and work as a team in order to achieve a shared vision.

Conclusions

Based on participants’ perspectives and my understanding, the Avery has been an effective and valuable site for the community, but it also has challenges to becoming an active part of the community and serving diverse community members. The museum functioned effectively in maintaining its existence for about a century, has been one of the leading visual arts educational institutions in the community, has functioned as a local and national tourist and entertainment destination, and has helped stimulate the region’s economy. However, the Avery is facing challenges in regard to changes in operational, organizational, and funding structures; communication systems; and an elitist community perception of the museum. On one hand, for example, the Avery has sustained itself as a major art museum that is responsible for visual arts education in River City for both adults and children. The museum has sustained devoted members and frequent visitors who like to experience what the museum offers. The museum also has provided successful outreach programs, such as visual art programs and after school lessons,
for public school children. On the other hand, some community members think visual art is not important, and the museum is not perceived as something that can be used by everybody from the community. The former quality of the museum demonstrates that the museum is a relevant organization that has maintained itself as an essential part of the community, but the latter indicates that the Avery does not interact with some people in the community at all.

In this section, I conclude how the Avery has become an essential part of the community, while I discuss its challenges in attracting more diverse community members. I share recommendations for the museum to become a more active, inclusive, and relevant organization.

The Avery as an Active, Relevant, and Effective Organization

While the Avery as a non-profit, private institution existed only for six years by the summer of 2011, the museum from its origin in 1925 has served the community for almost 100 years. The Avery has influenced lives of many including visitors, children, teachers, docents, volunteers, museum staff, and others. Although there is not thorough qualitative data about how the museum has influenced and helped people in the community, several examples clearly show that the museum has made an impact on community members’ lives through its various programs. One example is that the museum’s K-12 outreach programs have exposed many children to visual art experiences in the public school system in River City and beyond, where visual art programs are not emphasized or otherwise available. Another example is that some high school students receive scholarships through the Avery to attend visual art programs at various colleges and universities.

The museum has sustained itself in relation to changes in the community, adapting to the shifting cultural and economic surroundings. As I discussed in Chapters Four and Five, it has changed over time, moving to different locations and revising its mission and goals in relation to
the changing needs and interests of its community. The museum’s long lasting history
demonstrates that the Avery has had enough resilience to maintain its function as a visual art
institution and institutional power to become today’s Avery. In general, the Avery has modified
its location, mission, and function to be a more adaptive organization in the community in terms
of education and economic contributions.

**Education.** More than half of the participants said that the Avery has educated people in
the community for a long time. Historically, the River City community has been a blue-collar
community. The museum could not just function as a conventional art museum that is a
depository for collecting, preserving, and exhibiting art because the community has not had a
large enough group of visual art supporters who understand the traditional culture, content, and
function of art museums. Members of the community needed more engagement and education
about visual art rather than just being exposed to artwork with minimal explanation. Because of
this, the museum’s core mission has evolved to one that emphasizes the educational role of the
museum.

The museum puts its educational role first in its mission to serve the community. By
offering art-making classes, academic lectures and talks, and various outreach programs for
adults, youths, and children, the museum plays an important role in exposing adults and children
to the benefits of arts and arts-making. For some people the benefits of the arts are more direct
and practical. If a child, who experienced art-making and various arts scenes at the Avery,
decides to pursue a career in the field of visual arts, such as art teacher or designer, the benefit is
more visible and direct. For example, at the museum’s 2011 gala event, one of the scholarship
winners spoke very well about her experience with the Avery. She learned art at the Avery’s
summer drawing program and developed her own way of creating art. She also had opportunities
to show her work at the museum. She was going to a state university for graphic design.

However, some people might use art just for pleasure or mental relaxation, in which case the benefits are somewhat invisible and subtle. For some children, the Avery is the one of a few sources of formal visual art education. Through the museum’s collections from other cultures, the museum also exposes community members to other cultures and different ways of thinking. Local community art teachers and professors use the museum programs and collections for their curriculum and course assignments. Some people said that the museum provides “real” visual art experiences by exhibiting authentic artwork rather than showing replicas or pictures in books or online.

The Avery is one of a few places in town where people can go every day for continual education. Other arts organizations, such as the ballet or symphony, can only be enjoyed during particular performances. In contrast, the Avery allows relatively inexpensive access to an arts experience on potentially a daily basis. Participants also said that the Avery is a place for stretching the imagination, pushing understandings of new areas and perspectives, and teaching people for the future. The museum’s educational programs and exhibitions not only teach people new ideas but also challenge them to learn things that are outside of their comfort zones.

The former director, Ken, saw the museum as an essential part of the existing educational infrastructure and strived to strengthen its place within it. According to Ken, the museum could grow and has helped the educational infrastructure of River City because the community needed a more complete, balanced educational system. He felt that the museum had a role to play in the public school system, as well as in the university system and in continuing education. When he was in charge, he worked very hard to build educational alliances and to bring, for example, the Museum Studies program into the museum because he felt strongly that education is why the
museum existed. He thought that developing the educational infrastructure in these ways was essential for the overall development of the River City area.

**Economic contribution.** Most board and staff members whom I interviewed said that the museum plays a significant economic function in the community. It attracts new businesses and CEOs, developing a strong workforce for the area. The director of the Chamber of Commerce and museum board member, Callie, said if the museum were closed, it would hurt this community economically. Many businesses and corporations use the museum as a selling point in the area when they try to attract employees from other areas. Callie said, for example, “When I have a prospect here, I walk him or her in to the Avery. I let them look up the river, and I explain the community because it creates the immediate impression that we are sophisticated and we have a diverse cultural mix here. There’s no other place I can go in this community that does that as quickly” (personal communication, July 11, 2011). She also said that showing the Avery to prospective business partners and CEOs helps them to see beyond the widespread impression of the Midwest as “being parochial and oriented toward corn and frying pan” (personal communication, July 11, 2011).

In relation to the economic contribution of the museum in the community, many recognize the Avery as an important regional tourist destination that brings economic benefits to the community and acts as an entertainment site. While many staff and community members, including Ken, said there is almost zero tourism in the River City area, according to a professor, Dave, who teaches Parks and Recreation Studies at a local university, River City is a regional tourist destination, and the museums in the community are moving toward becoming more popular tourist destinations. According to Falk and Dierking (2000), after education, entertainment is the most frequently cited reason to visit museums. The director of the
Convention and Visitors Bureau, Michael, believes that the regional tourism and service industries are playing an increasingly large role in the region’s economy and that the Avery is an essential player.

**Social engagement and personal growth.** Considering the fact that most museum visitors come to the museum in a group with family members and friends, the museum is a place for social engagement. For example, on Thursday evenings several groups of people (approximately 30-40 people) come to the museum with friends and family to enjoy music, food, art, and other activities offered by the museum. They talk about exhibitions and programs together and share ideas with each other.

Through programs that address local environmental concerns and health issues, participants can develop a sense of civic engagement that can lead to real action and changes in the community. By working with diverse artists and collaborating with local organizations that are not necessarily related to visual art, the Avery provides opportunities for community members to be engaged in civic projects that address local concerns and challenges. These examples support Janes’ (2009) argument that a museum must play an active part in addressing and solving social issues in order to be a responsive and relevant organization in its community.

The museum also opens up opportunities for people who are interested in pursuing careers in arts and in becoming artists. The internship programs for college students, volunteer programs for adults and youth, and a docent training program for adults are targeted to help career development, continuing education, and personal growth. The scholarship program certainly helps some high school students to attend art schools and become artists or art educators.
Many people said that the museum is also a place for relaxation. One visitor said that he goes to the Avery to find time for reflection and feel a sense of relaxation. Falk (2009) refers to these visitors as “rechargers,” people who visit museums in order to reflect or rejuvenate.

While the Avery has been a vital part of the community by being a leading visual art educational organization for about a century, the museum has served only a fraction of the River City population, mostly school children and a well-educated, wealthy group of adults. For some people, the Avery is not an important element of the community, and they can live their lives without visiting the Avery even once in their lifetime. In the next section, I discuss the Avery’s challenges in reaching out to diverse community members and suggestions for becoming a more active and relevant organization in the community.

**Challenges and Suggestions: Becoming an Active Part of the Community**

Even though the Avery has adapted to changes in the River City community over time, the museum has not been successful in attracting a broad variety of people from the community and adjacent regions. There are several challenges that have limited the museum from becoming a more active organization and from attracting diverse community members. First, as discussed in Chapter Seven, the museum has communication challenges that are caused by personal and departmental conflicts and tensions. Another challenge of the museum is to understand the community fully, which potentially can lead the museum to provide successful exhibitions and programs that are relevant to many community members. Lastly, the museum has financial difficulties due to the economic downturn and changes in funding sources after it became privatized. In this section, I discuss each challenge with suggestions that were shared by participants. I also include the recommendations that I presented at the museum’s all-staff meeting, which I attended right before I left the Avery in the summer of 2011. My
recommendations at the meeting are also provided in Appendix D. In this section, I present my original suggestions in Appendix D with further recommendations that emerged through analysis, further readings, and contemplation.

**Inefficient communication and non-collaborative work culture.** The Avery has traditionally followed a hierarchical business model for governing the museum and its staff. When this type of management model lacks sound leadership, such as its executive director, establishing a clear communication system and sound work culture throughout the museum becomes challenging because the director has the responsibility for creating them.

Communication is one of the important aspects of an organization in fulfilling its mission and purposes (Guetzkow, 1965; Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982), and it is a means to create work culture whether it is sound or unpleasant. At the Avery, diverse communicative pathways have not arisen from the previously established communication system, which is based on a linear communication style. In addition, as discussed in Chapter Seven, personal and departmental conflicts and dynamics deteriorated the museum’s communication and collaboration among staff members and departments, which in turn created an unsound work culture and lack of teamwork. According to the CFO and the acting director, Ed, due to lack of communication and collaboration, each department tends to determine their own set of goals that are somewhat independent of the goals of the institution and other departments. Although each department takes initiatives that are worth pursuing, decisions are often made within each department without considering the benefits to other departments and their input. Insufficient communication among staff members and departments at the Avery sometimes led to a waste of staff time and resources and decreased productivity in creating cohesive sets of exhibitions and programs.
According to Lencioni (2006 & 2012), building a cohesive and collaborative leadership team is the first step to becoming an effective organization, and Janes (1999) and Setterberg & Schulman (1985) recommend collective leadership in museums and other non-profit organizations. As I discussed in Chapters Two and Five, the collective leadership model is based on mutual accountability, consensus decision-making, and rotating leaders regularly (Setterberg & Schulman, 1985). It is usually team-based and a group of leaders work together with other team members to achieve a collective mission and vision (Janes, 1999). When a leadership team is not cohesive or is absent, an organization simply cannot be successful because inconsistency or lack of leadership inevitability affects the rest of the organization including the morale of staff members, the communication system, policies, strategies, and more (Lencioni, 2012). In this case, the organization is not complete, and, therefore, its vision cannot be consistent throughout the institution. Therefore, I recommend the Avery adopt a collective, democratic, and supportive leadership style that engages the multiple intelligences of all staff members. This leadership style also allows an open and multi-directional communication system that flows information, knowledge, and messages, creating an endless network for new ideas to flourish.

The collective leadership style and diverse communication system also foster teamwork and more collaboration to achieve a collective vision for the future, which can lead museum departments to work together and to work with other organizations in the community to create cohesive and diverse sets of exhibitions and programs. Working together as a team from the outset to develop exhibitions and related educational programs is a great way to understand each other’s work and save time that could be wasted by planning similar things individually. In addition, more collaboration could be done with other museums and cultural institutions in the
area. Cultural institutions in River City can share information and help each other rather than competing.

**Understanding the community fully.** According to my observations and interviews with many participants, there has been little study of the River City community and what it would take for non-museum visitors to become actual museum users. Not fully understanding the museum’s potential audience in the community can reduce the Avery’s ability to respond to the changing needs and interests of the community. When staff members do not fully understand their community and who the museum would like to attract, the museum’s marketing and programming efforts become directionless, and its resources can be wasted without clear goals. According to Kotler and Kotler (1998), “if a museum fails to reach and attract sufficient audiences, it is not likely to survive” (p. 38). According to many participants, the elitist perception is one of the main reasons why some people do not enjoy the Avery’s current offerings. I suggest ways to make the museum a more comfortable place to visit. First, however, the museum needs to use systematic studies to determine what community members in River City want from the Avery.

**More research and studies.** Without well-documented visitor and non-visitor studies, the Avery’s staff do not really know why some people do not want to visit and why some have negative perceptions of the museum’s practices. As one community member said, knowing the community is the first step before trying to get people from the community into the museum. The museum also needs a set of systematic evaluation methods for its exhibitions, programs, and other practices, which would enable the staff to have direct or indirect conversations with their visitors through receiving feedback. Focus group interviews and more in-depth qualitative research could be beneficial to the museum for maintaining their current visitorship and for
inviting new audiences. According to Silverman and O’Neill (2004), visitor studies can help show complex museum visitor patterns and provide perspectives that reveal the blind spots in museum practices.

**Engaging the community.** The director of security, Scott, believes that the Avery is making strides towards being a community-oriented organization but is lacking the necessary steps to start opening up to the blue-collar culture in River City. He said that he is interested in seeing more practical and easily understandable art such as a motor vehicle show, which would be somewhat unconventional at the Avery. He thinks that would draw more people into the museum. While some said that the Avery would not do certain art exhibitions because they are not considered high art or fine art, can one form of art be more valuable, higher, or finer than others? Many local artists and art professors suggested that the Avery would be better received by the community if it would support local artists, show their work more often, and provide exhibitions and programs that are considered relevant to arts, culture, and economy of River City.

The former director of development at the Avery, Josh, said that the community not valuing visual art might be related to the Avery’s practices. In his words, “We can’t spend a lot of time saying shame on the community. We need to understand our community and how we can best serve them” (Josh, personal communication, July 19, 2011). The director of the Children’s Museum, Jackie, shared her perspective on attracting more diverse community members into the Avery. Having lived in the region for a long time and led the Children’s Museum for 20 years, she thinks the Avery has to find a way to somehow *Midwesternize* or *blue-collarize* the whole notion of enjoying arts. Jackie continued that people are more and more likely to actively engage and participate in arts experiences rather than just looking at untouchable paintings on the wall.
As Nina Simon (2010) put it, there is a broad variety of participation in gallery settings including people who “consume user-generated content, comment on it, organize it, remix it, and redistribute it to other consumers” (p. 8). While I do not intend to ignore diverse ways of participation that are somewhat subtle and considered less active, including looking at a painting, thinking about it, and talking about it, people in River City might be looking for something that requires more active ways of participating.

Several people recommended that the Avery has to be really out there in the community. The Avery has a fine and diverse art collection, great programs, and intelligent staff, but the museum somehow has to go out to bring people in. Public school field trips to the museum are great ways to encourage younger generations to be interested in museum visits, and the K-12 outreach programs are well received among students, teachers, and parents. What about people who do not pay attention to current museum offerings? How would the Avery get them interested in coming to the museum? For example, I volunteered at one of the arts activities that happened in the nearby baseball stadium. The stadium is a popular hangout for family and friends, and it has a nice area for resting and playing. The stadium provided us with a spacious area where we could put a large canvas against the wall along with tables for paint bottles and brushes. It was a community mural project. Anybody could squirt paint from paint bottles, smudge, or paint something with the long, large brushes. Children loved to participate and so did some adults. The museum was able to advertise the upcoming family day at the museum and to teach children about Jackson Pollock’s painting style and elements. This project was a good example of how to bring museum activities and representatives to the community to deliver a message that the Avery wants the community to participate and come to the museum. It also
combined art activities with a sports event that is already popular in the community, creating an easier transition from something they already enjoy to something new.

**Revising the physical spaces.** As I pointed out in Chapter Six, many community members mentioned that the museum needs to be a comfortable and accessible place for visitors to hangout and not be intimidated physically and emotionally. Daniel E. Stetson (2002), a former executive director of the Polk Museum of Art in Lakeland, Florida, said in his essay, “access and comfort of access aren’t about niche marketing. If you approach it that way, engagement becomes episodic rather than systemic” (p. 75). Because many staff members and visitors are concerned about the cold exterior of the building, intimidating lobby area, and sterile interior of the galleries, the Avery needs more greeters and gallery guides, signage, comfortable seating areas, and more comfortable interior design. Although the building itself is artwork and stands out, it does not seem to invite people from the community and even evokes the feeling that it is elitist. Some suggested that the museum could use its exterior walls as advertising tools by installing banners or projecting images or texts on the surface. The fact that the building does not say anything about the museum or current and upcoming events makes the building uninviting and somewhat lifeless. Several people suggested that the Avery use its plaza in front of the building to hold more outdoor events and attract people from the outside, making the concept of the museum as a closed-in box invalid among community members. The plaza is 38,000 square feet, but currently has only one sculpture, some benches, and several trees. Creating a more inviting ambience inside of the building in such areas as lobby, café, and library can be achieved through offering Wi-Fi service, which can attract young professionals, students, and researchers, making those spaces alive with people.
Expanding art. Through my observations and interviews, I found out that visual art is one of the least popular forms of art enjoyed by the community and that community members think they need special background and cultural capital to understand visual arts, which they consider the domain of elite and high culture. The museum could offer some free lectures and workshops about how to use museum resources and materials for local parents and teachers so that they feel more confident about bringing their children into the museum rather than avoiding it all together. In general, people tend to trust museum content and how it is presented (Kelly 2006; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). According to a survey conducted by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen (1998), many Americans think museums are most trustworthy when it comes to ways of experiencing history. Museums earned a score of 8.4 while professors earned 7.3 and nonfiction books 6.4, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least trustworthy and 10 being the most trustworthy (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). If the Avery has a program that reflects the interests of the community, the people of the region will respond. Cultural capital is something that can be obtained, but it takes time to build. It needs time, education, and mindset. The museum cannot do it by itself. It might take appropriate policies, willing staff, collective leadership, a knowledgeable and active board, community participation, and support from the educational system.

Many wanted to see music and dance performances at the Avery as well as diverse topics of lectures and art talks that are not necessarily related to art history and aesthetic interpretations of artwork. There are many ways to diversify visual arts, and one way would be to combine it with other forms of art that are already popular in the community and to expand topics of visual arts through an interdisciplinary approach. Director of the Children’s Museum, Jackie, suggested the Avery have more partnerships with music, dancing, and performance arts groups in the
community and provide something that is more interdisciplinary and participatory. As one board member suggested, the Avery’s building and plaza can be stages not just for performances but for various experiences. The stage could be expanded through partnerships and collaboration with various arts, cultural, and educational organizations in the community.

Jackie, the director of the Children’s Museum, commented that many people in the community actively participate in theater performances, music venues, dancing, and annual arts festivals around River City, but they do not often see themselves as arts consumers. According to a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2011), a narrow definition of arts participation based on passive forms of Westernized art appreciation constricts participation from diverse community members. The study concluded that arts and cultural organizations can facilitate greater public participation and become essential parts of their communities when arts participation is defined more broadly, including multiple forms of arts activities (National Endowment for the Arts, 2011).

Jackie gave an example: “My dad loves musicals and brass band festivals and all that kind of stuff, but he doesn’t think of himself as being necessarily a consumer of the arts. I said, ‘Dad, you are. Maybe you don’t understand the visual art but you love the arts.’” She thinks the key to success is to find ways to expand visual arts through connecting it to other types of popular arts forms among community members through collaboration. The museum has to open itself up to more people who do not believe that they are arts consumers and to understand how they feel about the current museum offerings.

**Sharing authority.** Another way to respond to community needs and interests is to invite community members to participate in designing museum exhibitions and programs. This might sound radical. However, the Avery has done some similar projects previously to develop
museum knowledge in collaboration with diverse people who do not have a traditional sense of authority, and therefore the museum shares authority in creating exhibitions and programs with them. A good example of sharing authority is the docent-picked show that is created in collaboration with many museum docents, who traditionally do not have the authority that directors and curators often have. Most US museum curators, often with an art historical background, create the content of exhibitions and choose what to include and what not to include in exhibitions and interpretive panels and labels. Therefore, they create museum knowledge based on their previous knowledge, experiences, and worldviews. This is why most art museum exhibitions tend to be closely related to art history and to an aesthetic interpretation of artwork and art movements that are not easily understood by lay audiences. Through sharing authority, museums can provide offerings that are influenced by diverse people with different background and perspectives.

Several museums have adopted this practice, and it is becoming more popular in other countries. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia, offers a community gallery called The Forum to provide opportunities for visitors to share their own displays, stories, and experiences in collaboration with the museum staff (Szekeres, 2002). Another example of sharing authority is the Glenbow Museum’s collective exhibition and programming practice. The Glenbow co-created the exhibition, *Nitsitapiisini: Our Way of Life*, with First Nations People whose culture and history were the main subject of the exhibition (Conaty & Carter, 2005). The perspectives, stories, and feedback of First Nations People were included from the beginning stage of the exhibition and programming process (Conaty & Carter, 2005). The Avery can adopt this approach by working with local teachers, students, and other community groups.
Financial difficulties. Externally, financial shortfalls caused by both the economic downturn and the reduction of city funding have kept the museum from becoming a more vibrant element of the River City community. In addition, because the museum recently moved to a new facility, it carries a large amount of debt as well as a shortage of funding for the curatorial and education departments. The museum intends to have more free programs that appeal to local community members to provide new offerings and to develop marketing strategies that could develop new audiences. However, financial restrictions have prevented the museum from offering more free family days, conducting in-depth visitor and marketing studies, and hiring more staff members to bring new perspectives. One board member said that the Avery cannot afford to hire more staff members to provide more services in terms of operations, not including collecting new artwork or adding new facilities, even though the museum is in great need of more human resources.

The former senior curator, Jack, commented that because of the budgetary constraints, the Avery has not been able to hire the kind of seasoned, knowledgeable staff, which includes the full-time positions of senior curator and executive director. He said that while current staff members are very dedicated and hardworking despite time and funding limits, the problem is that people can only do that for so long. Staff members without enough support and funding may eventually burn out. According to Schwarzer (2002), burnout in the museum profession hurts organizational efficiency and can become a health hazard. In addition, with absence of the executive director, donors feel reluctant to give money to the Avery because they do not know where the museum is going. This demonstrates how the organizational structure is related to the museum’s financial status. However, this financial challenge can become an opportunity for the museum to pay more attention to the needs and interests of community members (Moore, 1994;
Sandell, 1998; Weil, 1999). Therefore, the museum can attract more community members as patrons and donors rather than relying on traditional funding sources, which are becoming scarcer.

Several board and staff members addressed the need for a new fundraising approach to remove the museum’s current debts and raise more money for years to come, especially to be ready for the years after 2024 when the City of Watertown may decide to cut funding for the museum. Because of limited visual art supporters, raising a lot more money than the museum currently does would be very difficult. As I described in Chapter Four, the director of development, Reta, suggested a new fundraising approach that is community-driven. This method is based on teamwork, including staff, board, volunteers, and community members, who can go out to the community and find a certain number of people who can contribute certain amount of money a year. The new fundraising strategy has been successful raising approximately $400,000 since July 2011 (as of March 2012) twice as much as the museum raised annually using a previous fundraising method.

**Discussion.** The challenges addressed in this chapter may surprisingly lead to more creative ways of reaching out to community members and using staff time with creativity and a flexible mindset. The director of the Children’s Museum, Jackie, said that creativity, collaboration, and willingness to take risks would pay off eventually, but it is a never-ending process. In her words, “We need to change things and be willing to take a risk once in a while to see if it’s going to work and it's just really a never ending activity. You never get finished, ever. That’s the fun part about it” (Jackie, personal communication, July 29, 2011). She also added:

> When you put a good collaboration together there are people who will fund that because funders like to see amenities working together and not trying to do everything on their
own. You know I can say this after 20 years; it is a lot easier to work with partners than it is to try to do it on your own.” (Jackie, personal communication, July 29, 2011)

The director of development, Reta, said that if the museum fails to understand and serve the various members of the community, it will not exist 20 years from now. In Reta’s words, “We can’t just serve upper-level class people, who are only fraction of the community if we want to create a sense of ownership” (personal communication, May 19, 2011), which is a key in establishing the Avery as an integral part of the community where members feel comfortable visiting and participating.

Perhaps, Anderson’s new set of mission statements can act as a helpful mindset for the Avery in order to achieve more interactions and relevance among community members. Anderson (2010) suggests that museums might need to revise their traditional mission statements (to collect, preserve, and interpret) and adopt a new set of mission statements that reflect the changing needs and interests of society, that is, to gather, steward, and converse. Museums are no longer places for objects but for people, so they need to gather not only objects but also people, expertise, and experiences to make museums alive and more active. Because their new collection is more than objects, museums need to steward rather than preserve their living collections of people, expertise, and experiences. Lastly, museums converse with involved people, living collections, and their visitors and community members in order to be more relevant and connected. This new set of mission statements views museums as organic organizations that deserve proper management and stewardship in order to sustain themselves and to be better organizations for the years to come.

Lastly I would like to suggest that the Avery be a learning organization that is led by teachers, leaders, and collaborators rather than managers, followers, and lone workers.
Avery is already a learning, organic, and cultural organization in the way that it has coevolved with the community’s needs and interests. It is an open and complex system that is influenced by involved people and surrounding environments. However, this does not mean that the museum cannot be more effective and more relevant to a wide range of community members and non-visitors to the museum. As I have emphasized in this study several times, organizations can grow and learn to improve themselves through tight relationships and various interactions among people and resources. I believe Senge (2006)’s five disciplines to lead an origination to an innovative and sustainable learning community would be helpful for the Avery in order to create a better learning and work environment.

First, systems thinking is the most critical aspect of understanding and becoming a learning organization. Systems thinking is the framework for understanding an organization as an open and cultural system that is connected to many parts of the organization and its community, has a unique institutional culture that distinguishes it from other organizations, and changes over time in relation to changes in the system (Senge, 2006). It is a useful mindset to think of an organization as an organic entity that it is alive in a sense because of its mobility and flexibility. Second, personal mastery is a special level of proficiency to keep an open and passionate attitude for life-long learning rather than dominance over other people and things (Senge, 2006). In order to create a learning organization, people who work in the organization need the discipline of personal mastery to learn new things and maintain the will to work with others. Senge (2006) said “organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (p. 139).

All people have assumptions, images, ideas, and stories about a person, organization, community, and the world (Senge, 2006). In the third discipline, mental models are understood simply as what most people call stereotypes and generalizations about things. According to
Senge (2006), what is most important is that mental models determine how people act. A person would act a certain way around someone who he thinks is trustworthy and would act differently around a person who he thinks is not trustworthy. Therefore, in order to construct a learning organization, people in the organization should test, improve, and critically securitize negative assumptions about human behaviors and practices and foster openness to differences (Senge, 2006). The fourth discipline is to build a shared vision among people involved in the organization. Collective learning becomes more effective when all involved people share a collective vision that they truly want to accomplish (Senge, 2006). In most organizations, the vision is not a collective vision. It usually comes from one person or a handful group of people who are in charge and this vision is often imposed on the rest of the organization (Senge, 2006). A shared vision needs to be embraced by the personal vision of individuals involved because people do not care for a vision that does not personally matter to them (Senge, 2006). For example, the Avery’s vision was set by the former director, Ken. Most staff members said that he did not communicate about his vision with other staff members enough, and staff members did not feel that his vision mattered to them. That’s why most staff members felt that the museum did not have a shared vision for the future. The Avery has to find ways to share a similar vision in each staff member’s mind, while how to achieve it can be varied depending on their responsibilities and tasks. Effective communication plays an important role in sharing a vision among many people who hold different values and beliefs.

The last discipline Senge (2006) suggests is team learning. Its premise is that members can learn and grow more rapidly when they learn to work together (Senge, 2006). Team learning can bring out more intelligence from many minds than one mind can provide, and it fosters institutional trust that people in the organization complement each other’s actions (Senge, 2006).
Team learning can be possible when team members support each one another through instructing and enhancing each other’s practices and skills (Senge, 2006). Effective team learning requires effective communication through dialogue and discussion (Senge, 2006). Dialogues allow “free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues” (Senge, 2006, p. 237) while discussion is the process to present and defend different views in the search of the best view to support decisions. As I explained in Chapter Seven describing the work culture of the Avery, staff members at the Avery may lack the discipline of team learning.

According to Senge (2006), these five disciplines have to work together in order to construct a learning organization. Achieving only one of them will not lead to a learning organization, not to mention it is impossible because it is against the very first discipline of systems thinking.

The Avery is not a fixed entity but a culture and process constructed by social relationships and communication that are continually being reconstructed (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1984). How people, who are involved with the Avery’s practices, communicate with each other and with their community will determine where the museum will stand in the future. As many participants said, the Avery cannot be a traditional art museum in this blue-collar community with a small group of traditional visual art supporters. It needs to step up, be out there, and be active. It needs to build its own image, identity, roles, and presence in the community in order to be an integrated part of the larger community.

**Research Questions and Answers**

I explored this dissertation with three research questions: 1) How is an art museum connected to its community? 2) How do the museum’s primary services (exhibitions and programs) and practices influence the museum’s visitorship and perceptions among community
Question One

In Chapters Four and Five, I answered the first question—How is an art museum connected to its community?—through examining the museum in relation to the community’s economic, demographic, cultural, and educational environments. By investigating the history of the museum and community, I also explained how they have coevolved. For example, changes in major industries from heavy manufacturing and agriculture to service, tourism, and education created more demand for arts, cultural, and informal educational organizations. Due to these changes, the Avery moved to a larger facility downtown to serve more people, and its target audiences became broader to include all River City residents. The museum also responded to changing needs of the community by revising its mission that now focuses more on education than on collecting and researching. That the museum is an integrated part of the community is emphasized by the fact that the museum’s board members, staff, docents, and volunteers are also River City residents who love the community and believe that helping the Avery and other educational institutions will help the community in general.

In addition, in the first section of Chapter Six and the conclusion section in Chapter Eight, I discussed how the Avery has influenced lives of people in River City through its educational programs, outreach lessons for K-12 children, art-making classes, and special projects. Explained in Chapter Four and the conclusion section of Chapter Eight, I discussed the economic connection between the museum and community: that the museum attracts businesses and desired workforces to the community and the museum is a hub for regional tourist
destination, stimulating the economy of the community. As explained in Chapter Six in the first section on museum’s exhibitions and programs and in Chapter Eight’s conclusion, the Avery has been one of the leading visual arts educational institutions in the community by being part of the community’s informal cultural and educational infrastructure.

**Question Two**

Through examining the Avery’s exhibitions and programs and the community’s perception about the museum in Chapter Six, I answered the second question: How do the museum’s primary services (exhibitions and programs) and practices influence the museum’s visitorship and perceptions among community members? I investigated what kind of exhibitions and programs are popular among community members in River City. Community members like museum services that are relevant to their daily lives as well as arts and culture of the Midwest. For example, practical art exhibitions, such as craft and furniture shows and regionalist art exhibitions are popular among community members. Visitors also shared that they would like something that is more participatory, active, and easy to understand even if they are not directly related to visual arts or aesthetic education. On the other hand, many shared that they do not feel comfortable visiting the museum just for exhibitions and programs that are heavy on Western art history and aesthetic interpretation of significant works of art or artifacts. Visitors also did not appreciate the museum’s art history terminology-heavy labels that are difficult understand and do not connect to their personal experiences and backgrounds. Because most of the museum’s programs and exhibitions are based on art history and aesthetic interpretation of artworks, the museum’s primary visitors tend to be well educated and socioeconomically affluent, having sufficient cultural capital to understand and speak about art in museum settings. Therefore, some
community members feel that the museum is elitist and that is only for a handful of highly educated and affluent people in the community.

There are other factors that suggest why the museum tends to attract a certain group of people and why some think it is elitist, uninviting, and uncomfortable to visit. People in the community do not appreciate the museum’s new building because of its expensive and contemporary look. Furthermore, some people are scared away from the museum because of its physical appearance. The River City has a small visual art supporting community, and most people do not value visual arts. They feel that they need special education or background to understand art and participate in the Avery’s activities. Finding ways to eliminate this perception of negativity and the mysterious qualities of visual arts would be the first step for making community members feel comfortable visiting the Avery.

Question Three

Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I answered the third question: What is the work culture of the Avery, and how does the work culture influence the museum’s overall practice? By examining the Avery’s internal communication systems, communication challenges, and dynamic relationships and tensions among staff members and department, I drew a picture of the Avery’s internal work culture that shapes the museum’s overall services that are used by community members. The Avery staff and board members communicate with each other through face-to-face meetings while emails, memorandums, and meeting minutes are used for indirect communication to distribute mass information. While the museum has regular meetings scheduled, sometimes communication gets lost and is not effective. Subsequently, not everybody is involved in major decision-making processes and in important activities. There are redundant overlaps in departments’ tasks because of lack of communication and collaboration.
The museum’s divided office space having the curatorial department on the first floor and rest of them on the second floor does not help foster interdepartmental communication and collaboration. In addition, there are tensions and unpleasant personal problems among staff members that are rarely addressed in staff meetings, which deteriorates the museum’s communication system even more. The work culture of the museum affects the museum’s final services such as exhibitions and programs. For example, while the museum’s exhibitions and programs are meant to follow one cohesive theme, the education and curatorial departments do not work together to create both services from the outset. Therefore, sometimes the museum’s programs and exhibitions are not very cohesive. I suggested that the museum has to find ways to be a more effective learning organization that grows to be better for the future. Becoming a learning organization also means that there is a collaborative and supportive work culture that fosters involved staff members to work together for the same vision and to be inclusive of diverse perspectives.

**What I Learned from My Research and Writing Process**

By conducting this study, I came to understand that the Avery has a unique organizational culture that distinguishes it from other organizations. Even two art museums that have similar missions have different organizational cultures. Ethnography was the proper methodology for studying this unique museum culture that is surrounded by the interrelated realities of community members, demographics, cultural and educational infrastructure, and the economic system.

Before I conducted this study, I wrote a theory article about a museum ecosystem model that is similar to the systems theory and cultural approach that I have explained and used in this study. What I did not realize in that article is that I did not quite understand how complex and
messy museums are and that there are so many elements that shape a museum organization and its overall practices. Through conducting this study, I was immersed in the museum and its community, and I learned that an organization or art museum is a complex organization and cannot be understood completely by an outside researcher. In fact, understanding an organization fully can be difficult because organizations keep changing and coevolving in relation to other shifts in the community. Furthermore, if someone else had conducted this research, the understanding of the museum and its community would have been different.

Through this study, I also learned that there are many elements and factors—including organizational structure; the culture of work and employment; the museum collection; the physical spaces; and the economic, cultural, democratic, and educational characteristics of the community—that shape the museum’s overall practices. Before I collected data, I did not think that the exterior of the building would affect the Avery’s visitorship; but, indeed, it prevents some people from visiting the museum because it looks rather expensive and very different from other buildings in town. There could be many more interrelated elements that shape the museum’s overall effectiveness and impact on the community, which are not discussed in this study but could be found in future research.

I recognize that doing research is a messy and complex process. Writing a dissertation is even messier and more complex than I ever imagined. At the beginning of the data collection process, I underestimated the process of writing and how long it takes to produce quality work that can be useful for as many people as possible. While collecting data could be the most important part of doing qualitative research, I struggled with the daunting task of data management, analysis, interpretation, contemplation, and the final write up of the entire dissertation. I continually rethought, reorganized, reinterpreted, and rewrote the dissertation.
Even if my dissertation is considered finished now, my thoughts and perspectives will change as I conduct more studies or revise the current one for publications. Doing research is a never-ending process, and I enjoy the creative aspect of it. When my studies are shared with many people through publications and presentations, it is very rewarding because they may shape other people’s perspectives, theories, and practices.

Writing the dissertation made me a better researcher, who is confident but humble. I experienced my maximum capacity to think and create, but at the same time I recognized that I cannot possibly know about everything. I kept confronting new concepts and studies that are fascinating and helped me develop my ideas and theories. Especially, I am fascinated by organizational studies that are done more in the business sector than in museums. While I studied and included them in my study as much as possible, I know there are more to be studied and explored. My desire to pursue organizational studies and business management will be further explained in the next section in describing my future research direction.

**Future Research Direction**

I intend to share this dissertation with the Avery staff members and other informants in River City. Most participants, especially museum staff members, were interested in reading the final report because they believed my study could shed light on the Avery’s practices, including positive aspects, challenges, and suggestions, which they may not have been able to discuss on a daily basis. I also would like to share my study with more diverse audiences in the field of museum studies and art education through publications and academic presentations both nationally and internationally. While I will produce several journal articles that are based on this dissertation, my final goal is to publish it in book form that may be read by a broader audience, that is, people who are intrinsically interested in museums, not just scholars or professionals.
Through this project, I came to understand that ethnography is a powerful tool for examining an organization in terms of its surrounding community. I also believe that this methodology can be applied to other arts, cultural, and educational organizations. In fact, ethnography is broadly used in the field of general education for studying schools and students’ learning processes (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gilmore & Glatthorn, 1982). I would like to conduct more ethnographic case studies of other museums and non-profit organizations in the near future. Since this dissertation is my first time conducting this type of research, I made some mistakes, and wish that I had handled some things differently. For example, I regret that I did not socialize more with certain staff members at the museum and was not aggressive enough in scheduling interviews with certain people who were not sure about how they could inform my study as participants. Through reflecting on my first experience conducting this type of study, I will be a better researcher next time when I conduct a similar study.

As I shared in the previous section, I would like to explore more about organizational studies and business management that are suitable for museum organization and management. I have a basic understanding of these theories, concepts, and scholars through a literature review in organizational studies, but I would like to study them more in depth. My plan for the future is to study Business Administration or Public Administration through degree programs, which will help me conduct better ethnographic case studies of arts and cultural organizations and provide legitimacy as a scholar who studies and theorizes about museums as cultural and systemic organizations.
APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS’ PSEUDONYMS AND TITLES

Allison—director of marketing and membership
Amy—former student at the Museum Studies program and museum intern
Andy—local artist and art professor
Ben—catering manager
Bill—facility manager
Bonnie—local artist and art professor
Callie—board member, director of the Chambers of Commerce in River City
Carol—director of museum services
Diana—docent
Deborah—board member and former interim director
Donald—visitor
Ed—chief financial officer
Elizabeth—visitor services
Emily—outreach coordinator
Enrica—associate curator
Jack—former part-time senior curator
Jackie—director of the Children’s Museum
James—director of corporate and foundation relations
Jason—director of local community-based theater studio
Jessica—preparator
Jillian—committee member
John—assistant facility manager
Josh—former director of development
Joyce—youth and family programs coordinator
Julie—store manager
Karen—administrative assistant
Ken—former director
Lilly—visitor
Mary Jane—curator of education
Michael—director of convention and visitors bureau in River City
Patricia—board member
Paul—visitor
Peter—visitor
Rebecca—education assistant
Reta—director of development
Roy—local artist and art professor
Sarah—former student of the Museum Studies program and museum intern, professor of communication in local university
Scott—director of security
Ted—registrar
Tina—director of the Museum Studies program
Tom—former public school teacher and current museum volunteer
APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL PLAN FOR THE AVERY ART MUSEUM

Approved by the board of trustees
December 18, 2007

Vision Statement

The Avery Art Museum aims to be a museum with a nationally recognized art collection within six years and to be the premier school of art and art history in the region within six years. The region is defined as the River City metropolitan area and comprises four counties. This region covers over 149,000 households and over 376,000 people.

Multi-year Plan (i.e. strategic or long-range plan)

Goals

1) **Collections**: build an art collection with a national reputation for quality and interest within six years;
2) **Education**: make the School of Avery Art Museum (SAAM) the most popular and highest quality art and art history school in the region within six years;
3) **Finance & Development**: achieve full financial independence within six years.

Strategies

1) **Collections**:
   - put on popular and high quality shows which appeal to all age segments of the population;
   - partner with individuals and organizations to sponsor, support, and/or promote traveling and in-house exhibitions;
   - acquire and borrow significant works of art and nationally-recognized collections from donors;
   - build a national reputation for the collection by establishing national pre-eminence in at least two mainstream areas (e.g., American Regionalism).

2) **Education**:
   - offer popular and high quality art and art history courses to all age segments of the population (e.g., art lessons for pre-school children, art history for senior citizens);
   - offer the collection as a resource for teachers in non-art subjects (e.g., use Audubon prints for environmental education);
   - engage each age group via partner umbrella organizations (e.g., offer art courses to reach more retired people);
   - establish degree programs in art, art history, and museum studies in partnership with regional colleges and universities (e.g., Master's Degree in Museum Studies).
3) **Finance & Development:**
- raise adequate money for operational expenses and raise adequate money for endowment plans;
- manage investments well (e.g., ensure endowment portfolio income exceeds spend rate plus inflation);
- keep costs under control whilst ensuring adequate support for key functions and allowing for needed growth (e.g., reallocating resources while staying within approved budget levels);
- involve more sponsors and advertisers.

**Specific Objectives**

1) **Collections:**
- plan shows based on target audiences and SAAM programs, and current and planned educational relationships;
- plan partnerships based on target audiences and exhibition requirements for each show;
- survey existing collection and identify deficiencies; identify major collections within board and supporter network that would address these deficiencies, establish relationship with executive director and/or curator of collections, and make timely approach;
- identify two internationally significant art movements and dedicate resources to building a collection of national repute (e.g., Henry Moore and 20th-century British art).

2) **Education:**
- plan courses based on target audiences and requirements of partner organizations;
- establish relations with senior executives in significant educational establishments in the region and identify how the SAAM can add value;
- identify and form partnerships with the major organizations dealing with each age segment of the population;
- further existing relationships with presidents, arts faculty deans, and art/art history department heads at local colleges and universities and demonstrate how museum resources will strengthen their degree programs in art, art history, and other academic areas.

3) **Finance & Development:**
- identify potential major donors within board and supporter network, establish relationship with executive director, and make timely approach; raise $800k annually for operations; raise endowment to $20m within three years; raise a further $30m within six years (making endowment a total of $50m);
- diversify investments, invest in areas of expertise, and negotiate lower fees.
- keep annual cost increases for current programs at inflation; provide analytical data to other departments on key metrics;
• use development department to seek sponsors and advertisers for shows and to explore other advertising opportunities not related to exhibitions.

*This document is slightly modified to protect the museum’s identity.*
APPENDIX C: THE AVERY ART MUSEUM BOARD OF TRUSTEES’ MEETING AGENDA

July 14, 2011

I. Call the Meeting to Order

II. Welcome and Introduction of New Board Members

III. Consent Agenda Items
   a. A & E Committee Report
   b. Education Committee Report
   c. Executive Committee Report
   d. Finance Committee Report

IV. Motions for Approval
   a. Minutes-May 12, 2011
   b. Consent Agenda
   c. A & E Committee Motions - 2 motions

V. Election of Officers

VI. Development Update
   a. Update on Endowment Campaign Planning

VII. Art Talk

VIII. Finance Review

IX. Other
   a. Director Search Update
   b. FY12 Board Member Contract renewals - status

X. Adjourn
APPENDIX D: MY INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AVERY ART MUSEUM

Yuha Jung’s Observations of and Recommendations to the Avery Art Museum

First of all, I would like to say that I am in no position to say anything about how the museum operates and how you manage the museum and develop and create exhibitions, programs, and other special events. This reporting is based on my observations and communications and interactions with staff members, visitors, and community members.

Many people told me that communication and collaboration can be improved among staff members, departments, and other cultural and educational institutions. I heard many times that departments and staff members tend to work in their individual silos and do not efficiently and sufficiently share what is going on with their own work. I think open communication and sharing more information among departments and staff members would be helpful. Working together as a team from the outset to develop exhibitions and related educational programs is a great way to understand each other’s work and save time that could be wasted by planning similar things individually. Especially curatorial and education departments could work very closely to create cohesive and well-planned sets of programs and exhibitions. I think more collaboration could be done with other museums and cultural institutions in the area. You could share information and help each other rather than competing.

You could share authority to curate shows and write labels. The docent picked show is a great example. You could do more of that by inviting local artists and professors or even students. The labels could be written in different voices allowing personal connections to chosen artwork. I heard a lot from people who I interviewed that the labels are not written in language that can be understood by many people in the community. I am not recommending dumbing down the content and knowledge, but academic terms and jargon could be avoided. If it’s necessary to use those words, you could explain what they mean using common expressions. The length could be shorter and supplemented by in-depth information in a booklet or gallery guide located in the galleries.

Since the museum has limited manpower and resources, finding common interests among community members is important. Maybe a non-visitor study would be helpful. You could ask them why they don’t visit the museum and what kind of art exhibitions, activities, and services they want to experience at the Avery. It would also be helpful to know what they think of as art and how they use it in everyday life. You could use the students in the Museum Studies program to conduct non-visitor studies. Tina, the director of the program, said she would be interested in that as well.

More family days and arts in the ballpark kind of projects are really good ways to reach out to those who might not visit the museum otherwise. I heard from many people that the Avery is seen as an elitist institution in the River City area. By going out to where people are rather than waiting for them to come through the door is a great way to show that the Avery cares about people in the community and wants them to visit the Avery. I think overcoming the negative perception about the museum in the community is critical in order to bring more diverse people, new audiences into the museum.

The building can be a challenge. It is a beautiful building but not everybody thinks so, and it creates some negative impressions and experiences for some visitors and community members. For example, people say that the lobby area is intimidating and the café is closed most of the time. I understand that the café being open all the time does not make sense considering
the fact that you do not get that many visitors. However, you could sell something very small, some drinks and cookies and muffins not to make money but to make visitors comfortable and enjoy in the museum. If it breaks even, I think it is worth doing.

Many people talked about the outer appearance of the building. Although it is beautiful, there is no identifying signage. It is difficult to tell that it is an art museum unless you look at it up close. It looks lifeless. I know that putting something on the building could hinder the architect’s original aesthetic vision, but I think it needs to come to alive and show a hint of what the museum offers inside the building.

I also hope that you can open the library to the general public and provide free Wi-Fi service for people who want to study your archives and collection or who just want to use the air conditioning and free Internet access. If I were a student in the River City looking for a nice, quiet place to work, I would buy a membership just for that.

I think expanding the meanings, styles, and genres of arts that are presented at the museum would be a great way to attract and develop new visitors and members. I know that the museum is trying to hold music and performing arts events in relation to exhibitions and educational programs. I think that’s a great way to tell people that the Avery is not just about a beautiful building with untouchable paintings on the walls but a place for social interaction and community engagement.

I also heard from many people that they feel like they do not know what to do in museums and they feel uncomfortable walking into the museum without having an art background. You could publish something about what you can do in the museum or offer free classes or workshops on how to use the museum as a tool for learning new things and social engagement.

I think a clear vision is needed. What you can do is limited but it can be in-depth and of great quality if you have a clear vision about what the museum wants to be for its community. Looking at the big picture and working toward the future would be a great strategy or mindset for establishing the museum as a very important educational institution in the community for many years to come.

Lastly, I want to thank all of you for being so helpful and friendly. I do not think I could have done this type of research in other museums. I hope this is helpful and look forward to sharing my final write up with all of you.
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Ph.D., Art Education, The Pennsylvania State University, December 2012
M.A., Museum Studies, Syracuse University, 2008
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Select Related Professional Experience

Visiting Assistant Professor of Art Education, 2012 – present, The University of Georgia
Instructor, 2009 – 2012, Penn State University
  Instructor – Concepts and Creation in the Visual Arts, Spring 2012
  Instructor – Capstone Course in Art Education, Fall 2011
  Instructor – Introduction to Visual Studies, Summer 2010
  Instructor – Museum Education, Fall 2009

Zoller Gallery Coordinator, 2007 – 2011, Penn State University

Museum Internships, 2007 – 2009
  Penn State All Sports Museum, University Park, PA, 2008 – 2009
  Erie Canal Museum, Syracuse, NY, 2008
  Syracuse University Art Galleries, Syracuse, NY, 2007 – 2008
  American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY, 2007
  Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, 2007

Select Scholarly Publications

Select Professional Presentations

Honors/Distinctions
Recipient of Penn State Dorothy Hughes Young Endowed Scholarship for Art Education (2011)
Recipient of Diversity Fellowship, American Association of Museums (2009)
Recipient of Distinguished Graduate Fellowship, Penn State University (2008 – 2009)