

**Visitor Experiences**  
**at the**  
**National Museum of American History**

**INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES**



**Smithsonian  
Institution**

**Visitor Experiences  
at the  
National Museum of American History**

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## Preface

This study, conducted at the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in May 1999, continues our exploration of the experiences that visitors value in museums.

The study reflects the cooperation of several people in its execution and analysis. At NMAH, Martha Morris, Deputy Director, Lonnie Bunche, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs, Harold Closter, Associate Director for Public Services, and Nancy McCoy, Director of Education and Visitor Services, have consistently supported our efforts.

In the Institutional Studies Office, Kerry R. DiGiacomo was responsible for data collection and Steve J Smith for the initial file preparation. Kerry also provided technical review of the report and guided it to publication.

Visitors — 755 in all — took the time to respond to our questions and offer comments. We appreciate their participation; without it, the study could not have been conducted.

Errors in interpretation are the responsibility of the authors.

Zahava D. Doering, Director  
Institutional Studies Office

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## Abstract

In May 1999, the Institutional Studies Office surveyed about 750 visitors to the National Museum of American History as part of on-going efforts to understand the experiences that visitors value in museums. Two separate but equally representative samples, one of entering visitors and one of exiting visitors, were interviewed in the course of a week.

Visitors approaching NMAH come with the expectation of a range of satisfying experiences, similar to what they have enjoyed in other history museums. At least half of the visitors are looking forward to gaining information, enriching their understanding, and seeing the 'real thing.' As they enter, they say that their most desired experience is a Cognitive experience (37%) or an Object experience (31%). After their visit, they report that they found the experiences that entering visitors were looking for, and that an Object experience (35%) or an Introspective experience (30%) was their most satisfying experience. Exiting visitors were much more likely to select an Introspective experience and much less likely to select a Cognitive experience (22%), compared to entering visitors. The NMAH visitors acquire unexpectedly satisfying Introspective experiences during their visit.

## Background

Several years ago, the Institutional Studies Office began a new line of research on museums and their visitors. We wanted to understand, from the visitors' point of view, what experiences they value in museums. First, we developed a set of survey questions that could be administered to visitors at Smithsonian exhibitions and museums indicating what visitors look forward to and find satisfying. We then conducted sample surveys that included these questions at nine Smithsonian museums. This document reports on the most recent of these studies, conducted at the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in May 1999.<sup>1</sup>

### The List of Experiences and the Survey Questions

Out of conversations with visitors, we have progressively developed a list of the experiences that people told us are satisfying to them in museums. We arrived at the wording for these experiences through an extended process of listening to visitors and testing various phrasings.

This list of satisfying experiences currently includes 14 items. We categorized these experiences into four clusters on the basis of several different multidimensional analyses of visitor responses: (1) *Object experiences* give prominence to the artifact or the "real thing;" (2) *Cognitive experiences* emphasize the interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience; (3) *Introspective experiences* focus on the visitor's personal reflections, usually triggered by an object or a setting in the museum; and (4) *Social experiences* center on one or more other people, besides the visitor. Obviously the list does not cover every possible activity in the museum. We expect that it will continue to change as our research develops. (See Appendix B: Examples of Satisfying Experiences)

#### Object Experiences

- Seeing "the real thing"
- Seeing rare/uncommon/valuable things
- Being moved by beauty
- Thinking what it would be like to own such things
- Continuing my professional development

#### Cognitive Experiences

- Gaining information or knowledge
- Enriching my understanding

#### Introspective Experiences

- Imagining other times or places
- Reflecting on the meaning of what I was looking at
- Recalling my travels/childhood experiences/other memories
- Feeling a spiritual connection
- Feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness

#### Social Experiences

- Spending time with friends/family/other people
- Seeing my children learning new things

Visitors have little difficulty choosing from the list the experiences they anticipate or the ones they have found satisfying in an exhibition or museum. This is true among those who have strong preferences as well as among those who are unaware of patterns of past experiences.

The NMAH study included two representative samples of visitors entering the museum and a separate, representative sample of visitors leaving the museum.<sup>2</sup>

As asked at NMAH, here are the key questions:

For the entrance sample<sup>3</sup>:

- On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in the American History museum. [SHOW CARD] Which of these are you looking forward to having in this museum today? Choose all that apply. Anything else?
- Which one of those are you MOST looking forward to in this museum? [REPEAT SELECTED ITEMS IF NECESSARY]
- How strongly are you looking forward to it? Not so strongly, strongly, or very strongly?

For the exit sample:

- On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in the American History museum. [SHOW CARD] Which of these were most satisfying to you in this museum today? Choose all that apply. Anything else?
- Which one of those was MOST satisfying for you in this museum today? [REPEAT SELECTED ITEMS IF NECESSARY]  
Where in the museum did you have that experience?
- How strong was your satisfaction with that experience? Not so strong, strong, or very strong?

The information provided by these questions can be summarized as follows:

For entering visitors:

1. all anticipated experiences (AAE),
2. the most anticipated experience (MAE), and
3. the strength of the most anticipated experience

For exiting visitors:

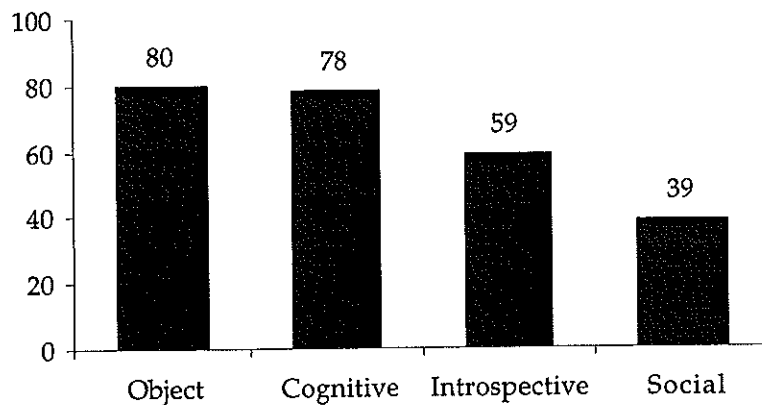
4. all satisfying experiences (ASE),
5. the most satisfying experience (MSE), and
6. the strength of the most satisfying experience.

## Major Results and Interpretation

### Anticipated Experiences

Visitors entering NMAH were particularly looking forward to Object experiences and Cognitive experiences: 78 percent chose at least one Object experience and 80 percent chose at least one Cognitive experience. In addition, 59 percent chose at least one Introspective experience and 39 percent chose at least one Social experience (Figure 1). The three most anticipated experiences were Gaining information or knowledge, Enriching understanding, and Seeing the real thing. (See Figure 2 and Table 1.)

Figure 1  
All Anticipated Types of Experiences, in Clusters  
(In Percent)\*



\*Percent do not add to 100% as respondents could choose as many types of anticipated experiences as they wanted. Thus, 80% selected at least one anticipated experience, which was classified as an Object Experience.

When asked to choose the one experience that they were most looking forward to, one-third of entering visitors (32%) chose an Object experience and slightly more (37%) chose a Cognitive experience. Only half as many (15-16%) said that they were most looking forward to an Introspective experience or to a Social experience. (See Figure 3.)

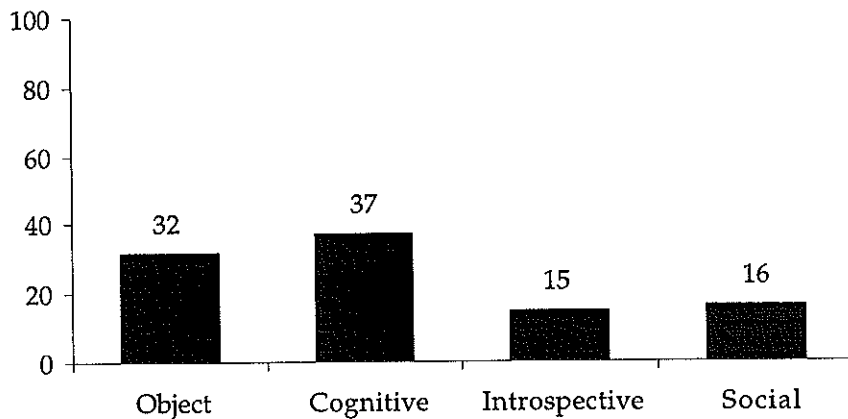


Figure 2  
All Anticipated Types of Experiences  
(In Percent of Visitors who Chose each Anticipated Experience)\*



\* Percents do not add to 100% as respondents could choose as many types of anticipated experiences as they wanted. Thus, 62% anticipated "Gaining information or knowledge."

Figure 3  
Most Anticipated Types of Experiences, in Clusters  
(In Percent)



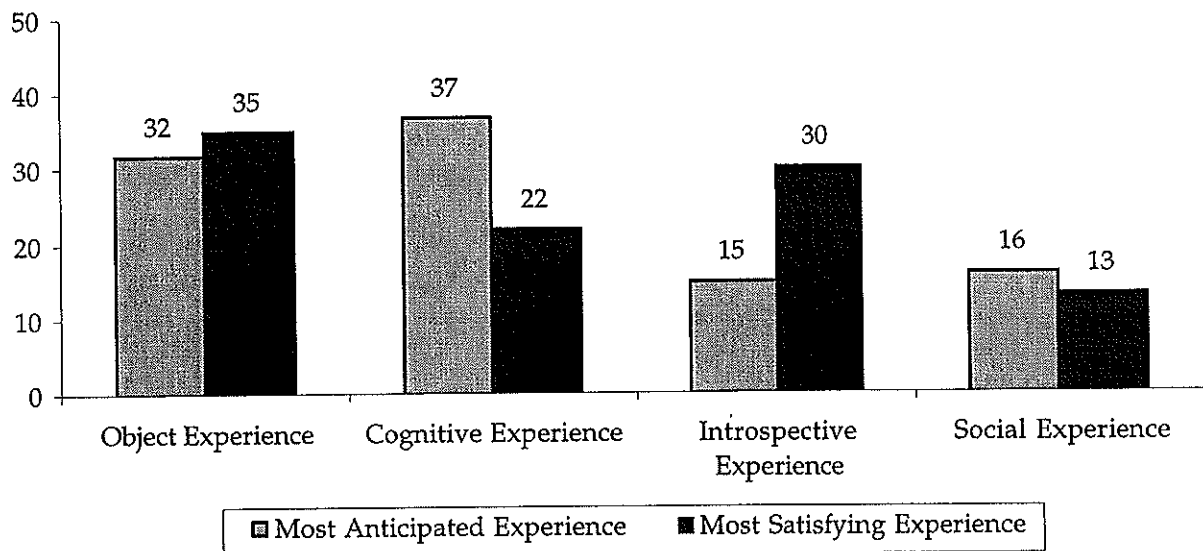
Overall these preferences were not especially strong. One-third of visitors (34%) said that they were looking forward to their most anticipated experience very strongly. The three strongest most anticipated experiences were Seeing the real thing (8%), Gaining information or knowledge (7%), and Seeing my children learning (5%). (See Table 2.)

### Satisfying Experiences

In general, exiting visitors found the same types of satisfying experiences that entering visitors were looking for. At least one Object experience was chosen as satisfying by 75 percent, at least one Cognitive experience was chosen by 81 percent, at least one Introspective experience by 66 percent, and at least one Social experience by 40 percent. Specifically, the percentages of exiting visitors mentioning Recalling memories and Reflecting on meaning were dramatically higher than for entering visitors. Other Introspective experiences were also mentioned more commonly by exiting visitors than by entering visitors (see Table 1).

When asked to choose their single most satisfying experience in the museum, visitors were much more likely to select an Introspective experience and much less likely to select a Cognitive experience, compared to entering visitors. (See Figure 4 and Table 2.)

Figure 4  
Most Anticipated Types of Experiences and  
Most Satisfying Types of Experiences: NMAH  
(In Percent)



The strength of satisfaction with these preferred experiences was greater than the strength of anticipation. Overall nearly half (47%) of exiting visitors said that their sense of satisfaction with the experience was very strong. Specifically, 15 percent of exiting visitors cited very strong satisfaction with Seeing the real thing, and 11 percent with Gaining information or knowledge (see Table 2).

## Location of Most Satisfying Experiences

Exiting visitors were also asked where they had their most satisfying experience in NMAH. Compared to the other types of experiences, Object experiences were located more frequent in the transportation-related exhibitions (16%), Cognitive experiences in the science and medicine exhibits (11%), Introspective experiences in the military technology area (24%) and in cultural history locations (17%), and Social experiences in the *First Ladies* exhibition. In addition, nearly half (47%) of the most satisfying Social experiences and almost one-third (30%) of the most satisfying Cognitive experiences took place in unspecified museum locations, suggesting that these kinds of experiences are less tied to one particular moment or place.

These data show that a visitor's most satisfying experience does not always occur in the exhibit that the visitor came to see. Entering NMAH visitors were asked if there was "something in particular that they wanted to see or do in the museum." By far the most attractive exhibition was *First Ladies*, named by more than a third of the entering visitors (36%), yet only ten percent of exiting visitors had their most satisfying experience in *First Ladies*.

## Correlates and Predictors of Most Satisfying Experiences

Our analysis found that specific visitor demographic characteristics, personal interests and visit characteristics were correlated with the choice of most satisfying experience.<sup>4</sup> The key results are summarized here.

- Men were more likely to find Object experiences to be most satisfying (compared to women). Visitors coming for a general visit, as compared to those visiting to see something specific in the museum, were also more likely to find Object experiences most satisfying.
- Visitors who live in the DC area were more likely to find Cognitive experiences most satisfying, compared to those from outside the area. Those who had made 1 to 3 previous visits to NMAH (compared to first-time visitors or those who had been to the museum many times) were also more likely to find Cognitive experiences most satisfying.

Young visitors, those under age 25, were less likely to find Cognitive experiences most satisfying compared to older visitors.

- Visitors age 55 and over were more likely to find Introspective experiences most satisfying compared to younger visitors. Those visiting alone, as compared to those in other social groups, and those visiting the museum for the first time were also more likely to find Introspective experiences most satisfying.
- Visitors age 55 and over were less likely to find Social experiences most satisfying, compared to younger visitors. Also, visitors with considerable experience in the museum (four or more previous visits) were also less likely to find Social experiences most satisfying compared to those with fewer visits.

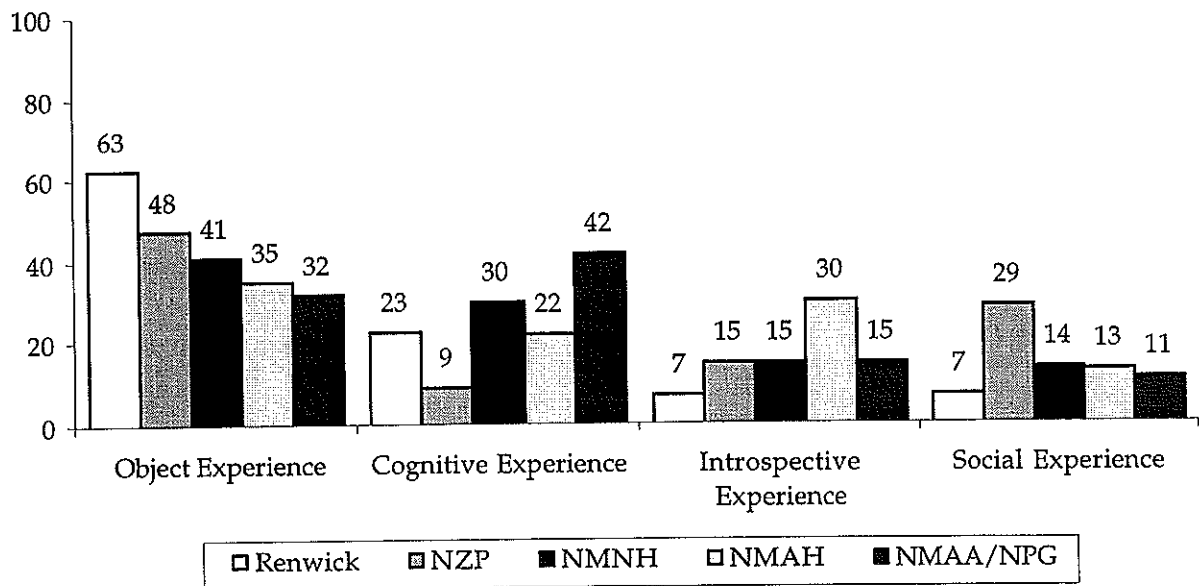
## NMAH Compared to other Museums

When we look at the distribution of the types of most satisfying experiences across the Smithsonian museums we have studied, we find that it differs according to the museum in question. Introspective experiences were most satisfying to a higher proportion of the audience in the National Museum of American History than in any of the other locations (see Table 3).

Cognitive experiences were the dominant type of most satisfying experience at the National Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery (NMAA/NPG). By contrast, only about one in ten National Zoo (NZN) visitors whom we interviewed cited Cognitive experiences as most satisfying.

In the Renwick Gallery, a museum of American crafts, Object experiences were found most satisfying by nearly two out of three visitors. Object experiences were also the dominant type of most satisfying experience in the zoo and the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). Social experiences were most satisfying to zoo visitors, compared to the other museums (see Figure 5).

Figure 5  
Most Satisfying Types of Experiences in Smithsonian Museums  
(In Percent)



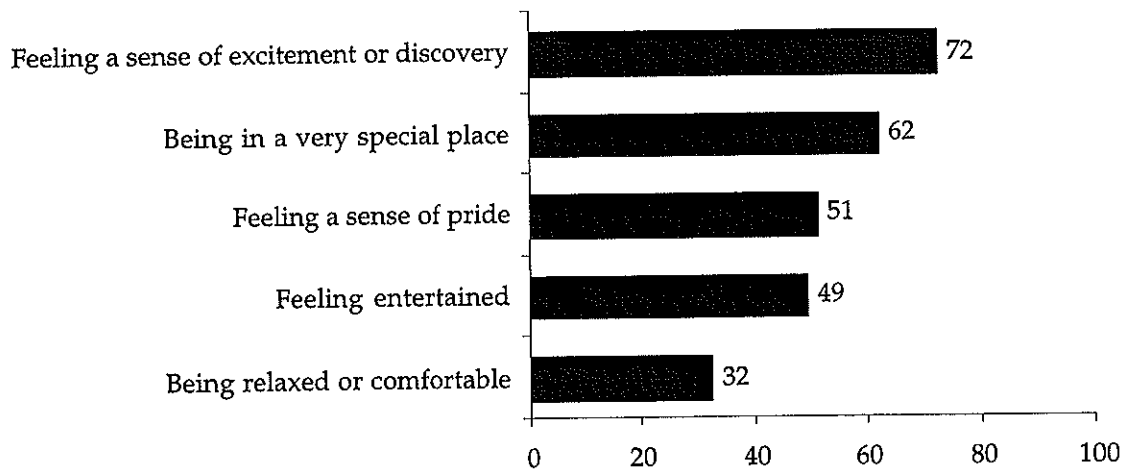
## NMAH Visitor Feelings About the Smithsonian

In addition to their satisfying experiences, we asked visitors to consider a list of five feelings towards their Smithsonian visit in general and to indicate how strongly the respondent felt them to be, relative to one another.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, 72 percent of visitors reported "feeling a sense of excitement or discovery" and 62 percent reported "being in a very special place." About half of the visitors admitted

“feeling a sense of pride” (51%) and “feeling entertained” (49%). Only one-third (32%) reported “being relaxed or comfortable” (see Figure 6).

Figure 6  
Feelings towards the Smithsonian Visit  
(In Percent of Visitors who Selected Each Item)



These feelings were essentially the same for entering visitors as for exiting visitors. The visit to NMAH did not change any of these five feelings toward the Smithsonian visit.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> A paper based on results from all the studies will appear as Pekarik, A. J., Doering, Z. D. & Karns, D. A. (1999) Exploring Satisfying Experiences in Museums. *Curator* 42(2). [forthcoming]

<sup>2</sup> The NMAH study was conducted between May 19 and 25, 1999; the response rate was 80%. A total of 475 interviews were completed at the entrance and 280 at the exit. The entrance interviews were more numerous because we used two different forms of the questionnaire in order to address separate issues.

<sup>3</sup> As noted, we had two entrance samples. One sample, half of the entering visitors, was asked the question series reported here (anticipated experiences). A second entrance sample, that is, the other half of the entering visitors, was asked to select the experiences that they tend to find satisfying when visiting history museums in general:

- For a moment, think back on your experiences in history museums, including this one, and think about which ones were most satisfying. I'd like you to choose from this list the experiences that have tended to be satisfying for you when visiting history museums. [SHOW CARD] Choose all that apply. Anything else?
- Which one of those has tended to be the MOST satisfying to you when visiting history museums? [REPEAT SELECTED ITEMS IF NECESSARY]
- In general, how strong has your satisfaction been with that? Not so strong, strong, or very strong?

Across all the visitors we interviewed, the differences were not statistically significant, so we concluded that visitors to NMAH overall were looking for the same kinds of experiences that they generally find satisfying when visiting history museums, wherever they are.

<sup>4</sup> These results are based on regression models for US residents who are not part of formal tours. Contact ISO for a table containing detailed results.

<sup>5</sup> Visitors were asked the following question: "On this card is a list of feelings that people have told us about when visiting the Smithsonian. How strong are these feelings for you on this visit? If we give you five points total, how would you distribute them over this list so that it adds up to 5? You don't have to use all your points. You can split them up any way you want. For example, give all 5 points to one, give 3 to one and 2 to another, etc." Almost all respondents used all five points (94%).

<sup>6</sup> The strength of these feelings parallels their frequency. If everyone felt each of these five feelings equally, the average strength for each one would be 1. The two strongest feelings were "feeling a sense of excitement or discovery" with a mean rating of 1.5 (see Table 7) and "being in a very special place" (overall mean of 1.2). The weakest feeling was "being relaxed or comfortable" (0.5). "Feeling a sense of pride" (0.8) and "feeling entertained" (0.8) were tied, although pride was primarily a response given by US residents.

**Appendix A.**

**Questionnaires and Response Cards**

Museum Entrance x

id

interv  C  M  S  
 H  AD  AZ

Count \_\_\_\_\_

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian.  
I'm talking to people about their visit today.

\*2. Where do you live?

statecity

- Washington, DC
- Other US \_\_\_\_\_
- MD/VA suburbs
- Foreign \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is today your first visit to this museum?

- Yes 1a. Before today, have you visited other Smithsonian museums?  Yes  No
- No 1b. How many times have you been here before today?

q1btimes

4. On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in the American History museum. [SHOW CARD] Which of these are you looking forward to having in this museum today? Choose all that apply. [Mark all] Anything else?

- g. spending time with
- c. children learning
- b. moved by beauty
- r. seeing rare, valuable things
- j. seeing real thing
- o. thinking about owning
- u. enriching understanding
- k. gaining knowledge
- w. reflecting on meaning
- x. continuing prof. devel.
- s. spiritual connection
- i. imagining
- m. recalling memories
- f. feeling connected

5. Which one of those are you MOST looking forward to in this museum? (repeat selected items if necessary)

If first choice is g or c, ask for 2nd, 3rd. (character-uppercase)

1st \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_\_\_ 3rd \_\_\_\_\_  
sat1st sat2nd sat3rd

6. How strongly are you looking forward to it?  
Not so strongly, strongly or very strongly?

- 1st  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly
- 2nd  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly
- 3rd  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly

8. Now I'm going to ask you about your interest in some subjects. Use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means not interested and 5 means very interested. How interested are you in...

- art \_\_\_\_\_
- history \_\_\_\_\_
- science and technology \_\_\_\_\_
- natural history \_\_\_\_\_
- photography \_\_\_\_\_
- popular culture \_\_\_\_\_
- geography \_\_\_\_\_
- biography \_\_\_\_\_

artint hisint sciint natint photint popcul geoint bioint

9. On this card is a list of feelings that people have told us about when visiting the Smithsonian. [show card] How strong are these feelings for you on this visit? If we give you 5 points total, how would you distribute them over this list so it adds up to 5? You don't have to use all your points. [If needed: You can split them up any way you want. For example, give all 5 points to one, give 3 to one and 2 to another, etc.]

- s \_\_\_\_\_ Being in a very special place
  - d \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of excitement or discovery
  - r \_\_\_\_\_ Being relaxed or comfortable
  - p \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of pride
  - e \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling entertained
  - x \_\_\_\_\_ Unused points
- s d r  
    
p e x

Now just a few questions about you ...

\*14. Who are you here with today? (code whole group)

- Alone
- 2 adults
- 3+ adults
- Adult(s) with child(ren)/teens
- 2+ teens
- Tour/school group

15. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?

- No
  - Yes What? \_\_\_\_\_
- partwhat

\*16. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ age

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- HS grad or less
- Assoc/Jr/Tech
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate study
- MA/Ph.D/Profess.

\*18. What is your racial/ethnic identity?

- African American/Black
- Asian/Pac. Islander
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native Am./AK Native
- Multiple
- Other

\*19. Mark gender:

- Female
- Male

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|---|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
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| session                                   | segment   | location                           |                                | <input type="radio"/> Interview  | <input type="radio"/> Ref: lang |        |
| <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> Mall Side    | <input type="radio"/> SI staff | <input type="radio"/> Ref: other |                                 |        |
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Museum Entrance xx

id [ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]

interv  C  M  S  H  AD  AZ

Count \_\_\_\_\_

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian. I'm talking to people about their visit today.

\*2. Where do you live? statecity [ ][ ][ ] [ ][ ][ ]

- Washington, DC  Other US \_\_\_\_\_  MD/VA suburbs  Foreign \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is today your first visit to this museum?  Yes 1a. Before today, have you visited other Smithsonian museums?  Yes  No  No 1b. How many times have you been here before today? [ ][ ] q1btimes

3. Aside from this museum, have you been to history museums elsewhere? [ ][ ]  Yes Where was that? \_\_\_\_\_  No \_\_\_\_\_

4. For a moment, think back on your experiences in history museums, including this one, and think about which ones were most satisfying. I'd like you to choose from this list the experiences that have tended to be satisfying for you when visiting history museums. Choose all that apply. [Mark all] Anything else?

- g. spending time with children  k. gaining knowledge  c. children learning  w. reflecting on meaning  b. moved by beauty  x. continuing prof. devel.  r. seeing rare, valuable things  s. spiritual connection  j. seeing real thing  i. imagining  o. thinking about owning  m. recalling memories  u. enriching understanding  f. feeling connected

5. Which one of those has tended to be MOST satisfying to you when visiting history museums? (repeat selected items if necessary. If first choice is (character-uppercase) c or g ask for second) 1st \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_\_\_ 3rd \_\_\_\_\_ sat1st sat2nd sat3rd

6. In general, how strong has your satisfaction been with that? Not so strong, strong or very strong? 1st  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly 2nd  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly 3rd  1 Not so strongly  2 Strongly  3 Very strongly

8. Now I'm going to ask you about your interest in some subjects. Use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means not interested and 5 means very interested. How interested are you in... art \_\_\_\_\_ photography \_\_\_\_\_ history \_\_\_\_\_ popular culture \_\_\_\_\_ science and technology \_\_\_\_\_ geography \_\_\_\_\_ natural history \_\_\_\_\_ biography \_\_\_\_\_

artint hisint sciint natint photint popcul geoint bioint [ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]

9. On this card is a list of feelings that people have told us about when visiting the Smithsonian. [show card] How strong are these feelings for you on this visit? If we give you 5 points total, how would you distribute them over this list so it adds up to 5? You don't have to use all your points. [If needed: You can split them up any way you want. For example, give all 5 points to one, give 3 to one and 2 to another, etc.]

s \_\_\_\_\_ Being in a very special place  s  d  r  d \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of excitement or discovery  r \_\_\_\_\_ Being relaxed or comfortable  p \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of pride  e \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling entertained  x \_\_\_\_\_ Unused points  p  e  x

Now just a few questions about you ...

\*14. Who are you here with today? (code whole group)  Alone  Adult(s) with child(ren)/teens  2 adults  2+ teens  3+ adults  Tour/school group

15. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?  No  Yes What? \_\_\_\_\_ partwhat [ ][ ]

\*16. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ age [ ][ ]

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?  HS grad or less  Bachelor's degree  Assoc/Jr/Tech  Some graduate study  Some college  MA/Ph.D/Profess.

\*18. What is your racial/ethnic identity?  African American/Black  Hispanic/Latino  Asian/Pac. Islander  Native Am./AK Native  Caucasian/White  Multiple  Other

\*19. Mark gender:  Female  Male

ADMIN BOX card  a  b  c status session segment location  Interview  Ref: lang  1  3  Mall Side  SI staff  Ref: other  2  4  Constitution  Inelig.

Museum Exit

id [ ][ ][ ][ ]

interv  C  M  S  
 H  AD  AZ

Count \_\_\_\_\_

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian. I'm talking to people about their visit today.

\*2. Where do you live? statecity [ ][ ][ ]

- Washington, DC  Other US \_\_\_\_\_  
 MD/VA suburbs  Foreign \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is today your first visit to this museum?

Yes 1a. Before today, have you visited other Smithsonian museums?  Yes  No  
 No 1b. How many times have you been here before today? [ ][ ] qlbtimes

4. On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in the American History museum. SHOW CARD Which of these were most satisfying for you in this museum today? Choose all that apply. Mark all Anything else?

- g. spending time with  k. gaining knowledge  
 c. children learning  w. reflecting on meaning  
 b. moved by beauty  x. continuing prof. devel.  
 r. seeing rare, valuable things  s. spiritual connection  
 j. seeing real thing  i. imagining  
 o. thinking about owning  m. recalling memories  
 u. enriching understanding  f. feeling connected

5. Which one of those was most satisfying for you in this museum today? (repeat selected items if necessary)  
If first choice is g or c, ask for 2nd, 3rd. (character-uppercase)

1st [ ] 2nd [ ] 3rd [ ]  
sat1st sat2nd sat3rd

7. Where in the museum did you have that experience?  
[ ][ ]

6. How strong was your satisfaction with that experience? Not so strong, strong or very strong?  
1st  1 Not so strong  2 Strong  3 Very strong  
2nd  1 Not so strong  2 Strong  3 Very strong  
3rd  1 Not so strong  2 Strong  3 Very strong

ADMIN BOX card  a  b  c status  
segment location  
session [ ][ ]  Interview  Ref: lang  
 1  3  Mall Side  SI staff  Ref: other  
 2  4  Constitution  Inelig.

8. Now I'm going to ask you about your interest in some subjects. Use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means not interested and 5 means very interested. How interested are you in...

art \_\_\_\_\_ photography \_\_\_\_\_  
history \_\_\_\_\_ popular culture \_\_\_\_\_  
science and technology \_\_\_\_\_ geography \_\_\_\_\_  
natural history \_\_\_\_\_ biography \_\_\_\_\_  
artint hisint sciint natint photint popcul geoint bioint  
[ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ] [ ][ ]

9. On this card is a list of feelings that people have told us about when visiting the Smithsonian. show card How strong are these feelings for you on this visit? If we give you 5 points total, how would you distribute them over this list so it adds up to 5? You don't have to use all your points. [If needed: You can split them up any way you want. For example, give all 5 points to one, give 3 to one and 2 to another, etc.]

s \_\_\_\_\_ Being in a very special place     
d \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of excitement or discovery     
r \_\_\_\_\_ Being relaxed or comfortable     
p \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of pride     
e \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling entertained     
x \_\_\_\_\_ Unused points

Now just a few questions about you ...

\*14. Who are you here with today? (code whole group)  
 Alone  Adult(s) with child(ren)/teens  
 2 adults  2+ teens  
 3+ adults  Tour/school group

15. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?

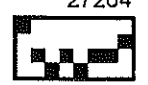
No  Yes What? [ ][ ] partwhat

\*16. What is your age? [ ][ ] age

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?  
 HS grad or less  Bachelor's degree  
 Assoc/Jr/Tech  Some graduate study  
 Some college  MA/Ph.D/Profess.

\*18. What is your racial/ethnic identity?  
 African American/Black  Hispanic/Latino  
 Asian/Pac. Islander  Native Am./AK Native  
 Caucasian/White  Multiple  
 Other

\*19. Mark gender:  
 Female  
 Male



## Response Cards

Question 4 (presented in one of three sorts)

- p \_\_\_ Feeling a sense of pride
- p \_\_\_ Feeling a sense of excitement of discovery
- p \_\_\_ Being in a very special place
- p \_\_\_ Feeling entertained
- r \_\_\_ Being relaxed or comfortable
  
- z \_\_\_ Unused points

Question 9 (presented in one of three sorts)

- K. Gaining information or knowledge
- X. Continuing my professional development
- S. Feeling a spiritual connection
- C. I say my children learning new things
- F. Feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness
- J. Seeing "the real thing"
- O. Thinking what it would be like to own such things
- U. Enriching my understanding
- W. Reflecting on the meaning of what I was looking at
- B. Being moved by beauty
- I. Imagining other times or places
- R. Seeing uncommon/rare/valuable things
- G. Spending time with friends/family/other people
- M. Recalling my travels/childhood experiences/other memories

## Appendix B. Examples of Satisfying Experiences

Object experiences. In object experiences the focus is on something outside the visitor, in this case the material culture object or 'the real thing.'

### SEEING 'THE REAL THING'

I liked having things there like the Kodiak bear. I always thought that the Polar bear was larger than the Kodiak bear, which, I guess, is wrong.  
[laughs]

—National Museum of Natural History

### SEEING RARE/UNCOMMON/VALUABLE THINGS

Well, I would say the special and the valuable things. The special, that had some kind of meaning in history, that's something special. Just like that drag racer there. There's something special about it. It's the first one built [to go] 275 miles an hour. There's special things about every little thing that's here.

—National Museum of American History

### BEING MOVED BY BEAUTY

If it's a piece that has that kind of impact on me, it will do more than click. It will almost take your breath away. [In the National Gallery] I would turn the corner and 'Boom' there would be some really famous painting. Usually an impressionist. I like impressionists. It would cause me to stop in my tracks and I would sit there and study that painting for 10, 15 minutes. And those certainly register in my mind.

—National Museum of American Art

### THINKING WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO OWN SUCH THINGS

I'm very pleased you chose Barbie to show the strides women have made in flight—stewardess to astronaut! Way to go, Barbie. I love the exhibit. Now I want to find the Shimmerons in the doll shows to bring my Barbie-in-aviation collection up to date.

—National Air and Space Museum

## CONTINUING MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I was hoping to draw mammals and birds . . . mostly hobby. Some of it I do for work. . . . If I know that there's a project that I have coming up . . . I'm a biologist. . . . I work with endangered species.

—National Museum of Natural History

Cognitive experiences. Individuals whose experience is clearly enhanced by contextual presentations tend to describe cognitive experiences as most satisfying. While the objects might still be important, these visitors find their primary satisfaction in the interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience.

## GAINING INFORMATION OR KNOWLEDGE

I find this [National Portrait Gallery] more satisfying than the American History Museum, which I feel in some way is much more low-brow. I don't think it's trying to dig deeper than people already want to know. In other words the history is things they all know about really well, and it's just a lot of things to look at. Whereas I feel this is things you're not going to know about, people you're not going to know. You might have heard their name, you might have seen their name at some point. I mean I've studied this, and am very interested in it, and I don't know half the people in the room, so I feel like most people are going to come here, and they're going to learn a lot if they want to look at it.

—National Portrait Gallery

## ENRICHING MY UNDERSTANDING

Well, that old boat up there on the third floor. I guess it was before they even broke off from the English. The fact that that's how crude of a boat they were trying to fight out of. Compared to just modern day technology of warfare. There you have it. A big shell, that big around, I don't know what they call it, that actually sunk the boat. I mean, that would be really primitive for nowadays. You can't quite comprehend people going out to fight a war on something like that.

—National Museum of American History

Introspective experiences are those in which the individual turns inward, to feelings and experiences that are essentially private, usually triggered by an object or a setting in the museum. Gurian (1995), for example, describes visitors to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as preparing themselves "to take on the visit as a journey of personal introspection."

## IMAGINING OTHER TIMES OR PLACES

Down in the African American section where you had the sharecroppers, cabins and things, I was imagining what it must have been like there. And different exhibits where you see the houses set up with the Japanese-American too, is another one, where you saw where they lived. . . . So I think just about what it must have been like for other people to be in these actual settings. . . . I think you understand what people have gone through to get you to where you are today. I mean, you know, there was sacrifice on all, and commitment.

—National Museum of American History

## REFLECTING ON THE MEANING OF WHAT I WAS LOOKING AT

Well, I just find that you can learn about the people by the possessions they bought or they designed. For instance the plates that Mrs. Johnson, Lady-Bird Johnson designed—you can tell that she's walking a fine line between what she felt was important, the flowers, and her husband's political career, which was the eagle, and trying to put a very masculine, kind of hunting-looking eagle with the flowers, and how she did a pretty good job of it.

—National Museum of American History

## RECALLING MY TRAVELS/CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES/ OTHER MEMORIES

There's a display case with dollhouse furniture. And there's a bathtub and a sink and a toilet exactly like I had when I was a little girl and I played with dolls. That was really interesting to see. I had that! I wonder what happened to it.

—National Museum of American History

## FEELING A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

Well, for us, [the Mammals exhibition] is a spiritual thing, also. Because, through this, we see God's creation. These are things that we didn't have as we grew up, okay? We only heard about them, or saw them on television, but this is a way of us looking back at what God created way back, way back, before the existence of man in time. You know, it started with all of this, with the animals.

—National Museum of Natural History

## FEELING A SENSE OF BELONGING OR CONNECTEDNESS

This is my favorite museum. I like it because it has American artists. I like it because they have Californian artists represented. It's where I'm from.

—National Museum of American Art

Social experiences. Some visitors select an interaction with someone else as their most satisfying experience in the museum. This includes both “spending time” with family or friends or the satisfaction of watching one’s children learn.

#### SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS/FAMILY/OTHER PEOPLE

And when I tell my friends about this museum it’s not just about the art because it’s—in the middle of the old building there’s kind of an indoor garden with a cafeteria where you can buy a cappuccino and sit and talk. . . . In Copenhagen it costs money to get into any museum but that one has free admission on Wednesday mornings and Sundays. So it’s quite popular to take your friends or family, see art, have a cup of coffee, talk, buy a postcard or two.

—National Museum of American Art

#### SEEING MY CHILDREN LEARNING NEW THINGS

Well I love when my children, when I've seen that they've learned things, that they're learning things. I know that's he's absorbing things. I feel like I've achieved something when my children—because I guess they say you live through your children—when I feel that my children have learned things and are absorbing things, because that's how you know you've made a good person. You're making a good person, right? They'll know things.

—National Museum of American History

**Appendix C.  
Supplementary Tables**

Table 1  
All Anticipated Experiences and All Satisfying Experiences  
National Museum of American History (NMAH)  
(Percent of visitors mentioning experience and  
percent of total number of experiences mentioned)

| <u>Experience</u>                   | <u>Percent of Visitors</u><br><u>Mentioning Experience</u> |                   | <u>Percent of All</u><br><u>Experiences Mentioned</u> |                   |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|
|                                     | <u>Anticipated</u>   | <u>Satisfying</u> | <u>Anticipated</u>                                    | <u>Satisfying</u> |
| Gaining information or knowledge    | 61   | 62                | 16  | 14                |
| Enriching my understanding          | 50   | 57                | 13  | 12                |
| Seeing the real thing               | 49   | 58                | 13  | 13                |
| Seeing rare things                  | 46   | 47                | 12  | 10                |
| Imagining other times or places     | 39   | 47                | 10  | 10                |
| Spending time with friends/family   | 22   | 34                | 6   | 7                 |
| Reflecting on meaning               | 21   | 31                | 6   | 7                 |
| Recalling travels/other memories    | 18   | 28                | 5   | 6                 |
| Being moved by beauty               | 17   | 17                | 4   | 4                 |
| Seeing my children learning         | 17   | 12                | 4   | 3                 |
| Feeling a sense of connectedness    | 16   | 17                | 4   | 4                 |
| Feeling a spiritual connection      | 14   | 19                | 4   | 4                 |
| Thinking about owning such things   | 11   | 17                | 3   | 4                 |
| Continuing professional development | 8  | 18                | 2   | 4                 |
|                                     |  |                   | 102   | 102               |
|                                     | N  | 399               |   | 1600              |



Table 2  
Most Anticipated Experience (MAE) and Strength of Anticipated Experience.  
Most Satisfying Experience and Strength of Most Satisfying Experience  
National Museum of American History (NMAH)  
(Percent of visitors)

| <u>Anticipated Experience</u>       | <u>Most Anticipated Experience</u> |        | <u>Not Anticipated Experience</u> |        | <u>Most Satisfying Experience</u> |        | <u>Not Satisfying Experience</u> |        |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|
|                                     | Experience                         | Strong | Very Strong                       | Strong | Experience                        | Strong | Very Strong                      | Strong |
| <b>OBJECT EXPERIENCES</b>           |                                    |        |                                   |        |                                   |        |                                  |        |
| Seeing the real thing               | 18                                 | 10     | 8                                 | 10     | 25                                | 10     | 15                               | 15     |
| Seeing rare things                  | 10                                 | 7      | 2                                 | 4      | 8                                 | 4      | 3                                | 3      |
| Being moved by beauty               | 3                                  | 2      | 1                                 | 0      | 0                                 | 0      | 0                                | 0      |
| Thinking about owning such things   | 1                                  | 1      | 0                                 | 0      | 1                                 | 0      | 0                                | 0      |
| Continuing professional development | 0                                  | 0      | 0                                 | 0      | 1                                 | 1      | 1                                | 1      |
| Sub-Total                           | 32                                 | 21     | 11                                | 16     | 35                                | 16     | 19                               | 19     |
| <b>COGNITIVE EXPERIENCES</b>        |                                    |        |                                   |        |                                   |        |                                  |        |
| Gaining information or knowledge    | 25                                 | 18     | 7                                 | 4      | 15                                | 4      | 11                               | 11     |
| Enriching my understanding          | 12                                 | 8      | 4                                 | 5      | 7                                 | 5      | 2                                | 2      |
| Sub-Total                           | 37                                 | 26     | 11                                | 9      | 22                                | 9      | 13                               | 13     |
| <b>INTROSPECTIVE EXPERIENCES</b>    |                                    |        |                                   |        |                                   |        |                                  |        |
| Imagining other times/places        | 6                                  | 4      | 2                                 | 6      | 10                                | 6      | 4                                | 4      |
| Reflecting on meaning               | 2                                  | 2      | 0                                 | 6      | 10                                | 6      | 4                                | 4      |
| Recalling travels/other memories    | 2                                  | 2      | 0                                 | 6      | 8                                 | 6      | 2                                | 2      |
| Feeling a sense of connectedness    | 3                                  | 2      | 1                                 | 1      | 2                                 | 1      | 1                                | 1      |
| Feeling a spiritual connection      | 2                                  | 1      | 1                                 | 1      | 1                                 | 1      | 0                                | 0      |
| Sub-Total                           | 15                                 | 11     | 4                                 | 20     | 30                                | 20     | 11                               | 11     |
| <b>SOCIAL EXPERIENCES</b>           |                                    |        |                                   |        |                                   |        |                                  |        |
| Spending time with friends/family   | 6                                  | 4      | 2                                 | 5      | 8                                 | 5      | 3                                | 3      |
| Seeing my children learning         | 10                                 | 5      | 5                                 | 3      | 5                                 | 3      | 2                                | 2      |
| Sub-Total                           | 16                                 | 9      | 7                                 | 8      | 13                                | 8      | 5                                | 5      |
| Total                               | 100                                | 66     | 34                                | 53     | 100                               | 53     | 47                               | 47     |
| N                                   | 445                                | 294    | 151                               | 206    | 391                               | 206    | 185                              | 185    |

Table 3  
Most Satisfying Experiences in Eight Smithsonian Museums  
(In Percent)

| <u>Survey Location</u>   | <u>Object</u> | <u>Most Satisfying Experiences</u> |                      |               | <u>Total</u> | <u>N</u> |
|--|---------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
|  |               | <u>Cognitive</u>                   | <u>Introspective</u> | <u>Social</u> |              |          |
| Smithsonian Museums  |               |                                    |                      |               |              |          |
| Renwick Gallery (American Crafts)  | 63            | 23                                 | 7                    | 7             | 100%         | 280      |
| Nat'l Zoological Park (NZIP)   | 48            | 9                                  | 15                   | 29            | 101%         | 150      |
| Nat'l Museum of Natural History (NMNH)   | 41            | 30                                 | 15                   | 14            | 100%         | 637      |
| Nat'l Museum of American History (NMAH)  | 35            | 22                                 | 30                   | 13            | 100%         | 399      |
| Nat'l Museum of American Art (NMAA) /  |               |                                    |                      |               |              |          |
| Nat'l Portrait Gallery (NPG)*  | 32            | 42                                 | 15                   | 11            | 100%         | 509      |
| Exhibitions in Smithsonian Museums   |               |                                    |                      |               |              |          |
| Twelve Centuries of Japanese Art from the Imperial Collection<br>(Arthur M. Sackler Gallery ) (AMSG) | 54            | 19                                 | 17                   | 10            | 100%         | 179      |
| Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion (AMSG)   | 23            | 51                                 | 23                   | 4             | 101%         | 68       |
| Geology, Gems and Minerals (NMNH)  | 40            | 27                                 | 9                    | 24            | 100%         | 168      |
| Mammals (NMNH)   | 28            | 34                                 | 18                   | 20            | 100%         | 120      |
| Amazonia Habitat & Science Gallery (NZIP)  | 45            | 11                                 | 30                   | 15            | 101%         | 87       |
| Where Next, Columbus? (National Air and<br>Space Museum) (NASM)                                      | 30            | 42                                 | 19                   | 8             | 99%          | 231      |

\*Since these museums are physically connected, studies involved both museums, and answers were not significantly different, results are combined.