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Classifying quality: Cognition, interaction, and status appraisal of art museums

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Abstract

How do experts assess the quality of fine art museums? While there is a well-developed body of sociological knowledge on evaluation and classification processes, there has been little work to treat museums as an object of inquiry. Yet guidance from the multidisciplinary museum literature only offers an undersocialized view of these organizations. I argue that museums offer a rich opportunity to study how classification, cognition, and interaction unfold in a developed field, because valuation processes are related to aesthetics in a particularly rich way. A diverse group of museum professionals offer their perspectives on organizational quality. The study finds that art professionals make an extensive range of symbolic distinctions in their understanding of quality, some of which are shared. How individuals compare museums to one another illuminates implicit status hierarchies and classification biases in cognition. A unique contribution of this study lies in the explication of different kinds of interactions between museums. In doing so, this study adds depth to prior work on evaluation, and breadth to research on inter-organization relationships.
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1. Introduction

What does it mean that an organization has a high level of quality – or in shorthand, is a ‘‘great organization’’? Many people would agree that a designation of ‘‘greatness’’ differs from one of ‘‘adequacy,’’ and certainly from ‘‘forgettable.’’ But while the differences between extremes might be clear, distinctions in the middle ground can be messy. Objective metrics can be used to measure an organization’s success, efficacy, capability, flexibility – but there are also a range of more subjective criteria that come into play. As David Hume (1998 [1757]) articulated more than two centuries ago, the evaluation of quality emerges from

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experiences with objects and ideas in our world, and therefore has situational, cognitive, and temporal dimensions.[1] Quality is enabled and constrained by a particular set of circumstances; informed by how we connect ideas in our brains; influenced by past experiences; and shaped by our relationships with other people and objects. Contemporary social science recognizes that while ''quality'' means different things to different people, there is often overlap in these meanings, some sense of shared culture. Discernment of quality occurs through classification of an object or idea in comparison with others, and it happens through interaction with other people.

The field of fine art museums offers a rich opportunity to study how these themes unfold in the setting of a complex organization. While to social science it may be apparent that processes of classification and interaction shape perceptions of organization quality, research on museums as organizations has not adequately incorporated this more relational perspective. In a certain sense, a museum is itself the result of an evaluative process, and the product of a long series of aesthetic judgments around cultural content made in social and temporal context. In a field of artistic discourse in which the definition of an object as ''art'' can be contested, the assessment of overall quality of organizations that collect such objects can be even more complicated.

While various meanings of quality are central to how organization scholars explore status appraisal and classification processes, extant research on the organizational life of museums has not examined how highly subjective classificatory processes or status appraisal are related with these meanings. To the best of this author's knowledge, no sociological research has explicitly attempted to understand how museum professionals explicitly make judgments about organization quality. How do professionals assess the quality of art museums? To what degree are understandings of art museum quality shared across individuals? A secondary set of questions is prompted by the undersocialized view of museums as organizations, namely: how do museums interact, and what roles do inter-organization relations play in quality evaluations?

In this paper, I argue that attention to the cognitive distinctions that museum professionals draw when making evaluations of organization quality can give us important insight into classification processes and status inequalities. To do this, I interview professionals at multiple museums to assess variation in the evaluations individuals make. By systematically uncovering actors' principles of value most germane to their field, I show how that while aesthetic meanings of quality dominate professionals' thinking, other considerations related to professional practice, organization structure, the public, and status considerations also matter a great deal. Analysis of how these individual meanings are shared sheds light on how professionals' evaluations of quality are shaped by interaction and social context.

[1] ''When objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination, the sentiment, which attends them, is obscure and confused; and the mind is, in a great measure, incapable of pronouncing concerning their merits or defects. The taste cannot perceive the several excellences of the performance; much less distinguish the particular character of each excellency, and ascertain its quality and degree. If it pronounces the whole in general to be beautiful or deformed, it is the utmost that can be expected; and even this judgment, a person, so unpracticed, will be apt to deliver with great hesitation and reserve. But allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice: He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame.'' (Hume, 1998 [1757], section 18).

2. Quality and organizations

2.1. Social dimensions of quality

Research has shown that cognition is interwoven with our social lives, cultural contexts, and interactions with others (Cerulo, 2010; DiMaggio, 1997; Vaisey, 2009). Several schools of thought offer explanations of the relationships between values, beliefs, meaning, and behavior. A recent comparison of different cognitive theories in cultural sociology by Lizardo and Strand (2010) provide a useful guide for thinking about how and when different theoretical positions gain most analytic traction. One line of thinking posits that culture is a resource – a set of shared meanings that facilitates action (Swidler, 1986, 2003). In another sense, our conscious and unconscious cognitive processes as well as situational dynamics play a role in shaping how we act (Vaisey, 2008). The cognitive acts of comparative assessment and commensuration of social value deeply influence show we understand and interact with the world around us (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). We know that humans also simplify, continually reducing the dimensionality of elements in our social world in order to make it comprehensible (Martin, 2010).

Evaluation processes are also dynamic, and our assessment criteria guide our actions in the world. Thus, the structure of how we evaluate and make meaning continually evolves as we are exposed to new information (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Lamont and Thévenot, 2000; Wagner-Pacifici, 2010). Yet evaluation and classification are more than abstract theoretical constructs – they have repercussions on how we live our lives as symbolic and cognitive structures translate to social inequalities (Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Pachucki et al., 2007). As Bowker and Star (1999) offer, ‘‘For any individual, group or situation, classifications and standards give advantage or they give suffering. Jobs are made and lost; some regions benefit at the expense of others’’ (p. 6). We find this sentiment exemplified in research that illustrates how from scrutiny public evaluations of educational institutions influence public expectations and behavior (Espeland and Sauder, 2007). Research on scientific grantmaking shows that idiosyncratic preferences for certain evaluative criteria are consequential in how deliberation processes unfold and funding decisions are made (Lamont, 2009).

Classificatory processes also inform how judgments are made by groups of people. Organizations are routinely evaluated on more specific quality-related dimensions, such as the quality of products and services, customer service, human resource practices, ethical standards, efficiencies, revenues, and innovation.[2] As Hume long ago mused, the best we might expect of an overall assessment from these specific dimensions is bound to be rough and tentative. Yet organizations are embedded within larger organizational fields, and corporate actors draw upon their cultural toolkits to navigate their worlds, making both coarse and fine distinctions along the way (Weber, 2005). Part of the difficulty in classifying organizations has to do with uncertainty in evaluating their quality. Uncertainty in perceptions of an organization’s quality are tied to its status; while an organization’s status is in part derived from its established history, it also comes from the status of others it interacts with (Podolny, 1993, 2005). How an organization is classified also affects shared understandings of quality, and thus, an organization’s legitimacy in the field (Zuckerman, 1999).

Corporate classification and interaction play out in a variety of ways. As Rao et al. (2005) show, the ways in which categories of cooking are systematically adopted or selectively modified

[2] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for helping to clarify this point.

can affect the propensity of a restaurant to receive favorable reviews. In a study of American businesses during the late 19th-century, Ruef and Patterson (2009) reveal that the evolution of the organizational classification system of the era had tangible effects on the kind of evaluation a particular business received. Lynn et al. (2009) argue that occurrences of a mismatch between an organization's status and its quality provide evidence of varying degrees of social constructionism. They show that individual-level uncertainty about quality does not affect long-term status allocation among organizations, but that group-level errors in quality judgment do affect the status order.

Cognitive processes matter in organizations as well. In a classic study of knitwear manufacturers' mental classifications of the structure of a competitive field, Porac et al. (1989) argue that, "it is impossible to understand rivalry... without attending to its cognitive foundations" (p. 412). Perceptions of organizational qualities can also vary depending upon an individual's role and location (Ng et al., 2009). A deep understanding of the particular classification system, organization characteristics, and the ways that the classification system and organizations interact help analysts to make sense of the consequences of cognition (Shepherd, 2010). The links between perceptions and organization attributes can be complicated to trace, and dependent upon both subjective and objective characteristics, as well as conscious and unconscious cognition. For example, Labianca et al. (2001) demonstrate that perceptions of subjective identity-related attributes guide a university's self-definition, while more durable perceptions of structural features help to frame a set of reference organizations. Both unconscious and conscious cognitive processes contribute to perceptions as well. Srivastava and Banaji (2011) show that differences between self-reported propensity to collaborate, and automatic propensity (using an implicit association test) influence how people interact in their organization.

In sum, research on evaluation processes, classification, and cognition in organizations reveal that quality has a number of social dimensions that guide how individuals think and act in the world around them. Together, this research suggests that shared perceptions (and misperceptions) of quality can have effects on organization life.

2.2. The case of art museums

The art museum field serves an ideal site to investigate organization quality because valuation processes are related to aesthetics in a particularly rich and unusual way. The visual art world has been a fertile site for social science to grapple with questions surrounding cultural production, social organization, and aesthetic legitimation (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; DiMaggio, 1987). Foundational theories of artistic classification, art worlds, and fields of interaction share a perspective that attention to the interactions between organizations and individuals can explain changes in our social world. A relational perspective suggests that the quality of an organization can understood as shaped by its interactions and its social context.

The dominant criteria of evaluating art museums relate to the quality of its cultural products. Though artworks have wildly contested notions of value, a child's drawing is as much an object of cultural production as a Picasso painting selling through an auction house. While the bulk of research on cultural content of museums is the province of art historians, social science has examined how social processes shape the museum field over time (Zolberg, 1984). A historical perspective on the founding missions of museums reveals how the American museum arose in the context of 19th-century patronage amidst a tension between elitist and populist orientations (DiMaggio, 1982a,b; Hudson, 1987). Analysis of contemporary art history textbooks illustrates

how the Museum of Modern Art functioned as a critical legitimating mechanism for canonization of early 20th-century artists (Braden, 2009).

Structural attributes such as organization size and financial capabilities are key dimensions that affect museum quality, as museums are embedded within broader art markets. Externally, fluctuations in the national economy and art market have driven change in how museums operate (Feigen, 2000; Laclotte, 2004). Museums have increasingly evolved into hybrid entities funded by private and public sources that constitute a significant part of the arts economy (Caves, 2000; Schuster, 1998). Shifts in funding practices drive changes in organization behavior; one of the most notable involves exhibition practice at major museums (Alexander, 1996). Among the most consequential sources of these changes has been the growth of the ‘‘superstar’’ museum (Frey, 1998). Scholars highlight a growing inequality between the capacities and capabilities of superstar museums and the broader field (McCarthy et al., 2005).

Scholars have done a great deal to show that quality is tied to the professional practices of arts organizations. Arts participation among patrons and trustees contributes to class cohesion among the upper class philanthropists (Ostrower, 1998). Curatorial practice has been party to an increasing emphasis on reflexivity, as curators have begun to interrogate their own position in the presentation of visual culture (Beasley, 1998; Marincola and Storr, 2001; Obrist and Boutoux, 2003). A shift in conceptualizing exhibitions has also occurred, from a craft of arranging and displaying artwork to an effort worthy of aesthetic recognition of its own (Barker, 1999; McClellan, 2003; Wallach, 1998). Museums are identified as trustees of cultural heritage, with missions that balance public and private dimensions, and an object-oriented and people-oriented curatorial focus (Cuno and MacGregor, 2004). Like research on economics of the museum field, research on audiences is guided by both aesthetic and market principles which interact with consumers' tastes (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Smith and Wolf, 1996). Shared meanings of art museum membership influence cultural consumption, and cultural capital attainment varies with audience experiences (Bourdieu et al., 1991; Glynn et al., 1996). Government exigencies influence museum priorities and functions to influence audience reception in both American and European fine art worlds (Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005).

Several exceptional studies related to the organizational life of art galleries examine interaction between art professionals, publics, and art markets to show how processes of cultural consecration and social valuation unfold. Through different methods, Giuffre (1999) and Velthuis (2005) show how the structure of relationships between individuals and organizations affects career outcomes and prices for art, respectively. In a contribution to our knowledge of status uncertainty in the arts, a recent study of stakeholders in the contemporary Israeli art market shows that while a contemporary artist's offerings have unknown quality, market interaction among different actors influences the social definition of what constitutes ‘‘high-quality’’ art (Yogev, 2010).

In a commentary on evaluation processes in the museum field, director Anderson (2004) cites admission, membership, and exhibitions as taken-for-granted metrics by which art museums crudely evaluate themselves. He argues that this ‘‘holy trinity’’ of criteria is a poor proxy for evaluating museums, and calls for more meaningful indicators. Similarly, the notion that museum quality may rest on less tangible criteria than other standards – its artwork, staff, building, or public – is hinted at by former director Weil (2002), who comments, ‘‘notwithstanding whatever difficulty they may have in articulating the basis on which they make such distinctions, museum people have a gut sense that all museums are not of equal quality, that some museums are better than others'' (p. 4). Weil's statement indicates that organization quality is clearly puzzled over, even if not comparatively analyzed. This, in turn, suggests value in tracing how quality distinctions are made.

3. Data and methods

In order to identify these boundaries between varying notions of quality, interviews were conducted with a group of 21 museum professionals at seven museums across the northeastern United States in 2005–2006. On average, conversations lasted an hour and were conducted mainly in person with seven directors, eleven curators, and three specialists in various roles (education, public relations, and collections management); a slight majority ($n = 11$) were women. All professionals occupied senior roles within their divisions. Professionals were recruited from seven different types of museum. Four of these museums were founded during the 19th-century, and the remainder during the 20th. Table 1 describes the composition of this sample.

The decision to focus solely on professionals – as opposed to including the public, or critics – has several motivations. Museum professionals are entrusted with making aesthetic value judgments on behalf of the public good. As they mediate both museum and its cultural objects, professionals must broker relationships between a range of disparate interests within and outside the museum's walls, from the public, to collectors, patrons, trustees, and dealers. Thus, it follows that because professionals occupy strategic positions as intermediaries between their organization and the outside world, their perspectives are unique. Individuals were granted anonymity in order to allow candid discussion about sensitive issues such as peer reputation. At least two interviews were conducted at each museum as a check against any one respondent dominating its organization's voice.

Three analyses of these data are presented here. First, studies of organizations highlight the connection between perceptions of organization quality and outcomes such as strategic change or status allocation. However, little of this literature explicitly involves the art world, much less the museum field. Thus, asking key individuals in different organizations how they tease apart an abstract concept such as quality in their local setting informs how social meaning is constructed in an understudied industry sector. To systematically analyze the content of interviews, I use a mix of deductive and inductive coding procedures based in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). A comparative analysis of the content and form of individuals' responses complements examination of the complete set of criteria outlined. This analysis is aided by constructing

Table 1
Sample description.

Encyclopedic Museum	**Regional Museum**
R16. Director	R8. Education
R18. Former Curator	R9. Public Relations
R19. Director	R10. Director
Specialized Museum	**Private/House Museum**
R4. Curator	R12. Curator
R7. Education	R15. Director
R11. Curator	
R14. Director	**College Museum**
	R1. Curator, Mus. 1
Destination Museum	R2. Curator, Mus. 1
R3. Curator	R6. Registrar, Mus. 1
R5. Curator	R17. Director Mus. 2
R13. Director	R20. Curator, Mus. 2
	R21. Curator, Mus. 2

''mental models'' of respondents' discussions around the topic of quality (Craik, 1967; Gentner and Stevens, 1983; Johnson-Laird, 1983). Such models graphically illustrate symbolic representations of both content and form of ideas, facilitating comparison and interpretation of patterns that might otherwise be difficult to discern. Interviews were coded using Atlas.Ti 5.0.

Next, examining how individuals compare and classify organizations can help to uncover relational aspects of quality. Discussions of status orders among museums were augmented by a pile-sort experiment in which a subset of respondents arranged a random sample of American museums into groups (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1983). Analysis of similarities in respondent classifications is valuable in identifying shared implicit cognitive biases in respondents' understandings of quality. Pile-sort data were analyzed using the metaMDS multi-dimensional scaling procedure implemented in the R programming language (Oksanen, 2011).

Finally, review of sociological research on art galleries suggests that interaction between organizations may help to inform perceptions about museum quality. However, little research explicitly concerning museums has given attention to this issue. Thus, interview questions posed to respondents on the theme of collaboration and competition between museums helps to enrich our understanding of how these processes are related to quality.

4. Results

4.1. Evaluative criteria and quality

In this project, professionals were asked to translate an abstract concept with multiple meanings into more concrete terms. Of my respondent sample, eighteen responded to a form of the question, ''*What does the phrase 'museum of quality' mean to you?''* More than a quarter of respondents discussed an inextricable relationship between museum quality, the collection itself, and the uses to which the collection is put. A curator puts it quite succinctly that, ''[Quality] begins with the collection, and its responsibilities towards that collection – understanding it, documenting it, treating it responsibly'' (R3). For this person, the collection and how the collection is used are the only meaningful criteria worth discussing. At the same time, the curator also issues caution about the idiosyncrasies of taste:

> You can set any set of criteria above one another and it's going to ultimately be a matter of, ''Well, I like it more than you do.'' I don't think that anyone is going to be able to say, ''Ah, well, yes, indeed, in terms of nineteenth-century American, or nineteenth-century French: ah, yes, I have the great collection.'' There's nothing you can weigh – Boston against New York, against Washington – in nineteenth-century French [collections] and have a real clear and obvious winner. (R3, curator)

For R3, a highly individualized subjectivity of taste precludes any sense that criteria of evaluation might be shared or patterned in similar ways. Within the broad category of ''the collection'', the curator's remarks point to boundaries of genre specialization as meaningful.

Many respondents took pains to explain that museum quality was far more than the collections within its walls. One curator elaborates that, ''. . .[t]here are museums who just don't have the finances or the facility to really express or really get across the strength of collections. So, it does go way beyond the objects. I'd like to think it had everything to do with the objects, but it doesn't'' (R4). Similarly, though a director initially declined to provide a definition of quality, after being probed to instantiate a *great* museum, a more robust explanation emerged. For this director, museum quality relies not only on what it has, but what it does, and how well it does it:

> The ‘‘Q’’ word [quality] is a tough one... but a great museum? What are your public programs like; how well [do] you interact with your community; are you supported in both foot-traffic and financially, and because of the effectiveness with which you are dealing with your audiences; are you doing serious exhibitions, or exhibitions that are not only bringing in people, but also addressing issues within the world of art and ideas in a way that is changing the way people think about works of art? I think that's of value. Are you indeed enhancing the collection in ways that people within the field but also in your community respect and admire? So: acquisitions, exhibitions, public programming (in terms of quality, kind and reach) and general community access. (R13)

This director also calls attention to criteria surrounding social worth by pointing to a boundary between professional and public perceptions of reputation. While professionals took care to articulate explicit criteria related to quality in the museum field, various individuals point to the socially constructed nature of quality. According to another director,

> I still hear my colleagues talk about the ‘‘inherent value of art.’’ I don't know what the hell that means. I mean, I really have no clue. The inherent value of anything – intrinsic value, or inherent value? We put value on things – they don't have value all by themselves. So then, the notion that there is intrinsic value that any human being anywhere would immediately perceive and apprehend is just palpably and materially false. Take Mona Lisa to China and other than the fact that it's famous, tell me how people [...] are actually going to go see it? [...] In the context of art museums, as simplistic and simple as it is, that is kind of a new idea – that there's not inherent values... (R14)

The director's strong comments harmonize with a great deal of sociological thinking in explaining that the symbolic value we attribute to a cultural product is shaped by the social context of its reception and production (Peterson and Berger, 1975). Visitor experience also contributes to overall assessment of museum quality. One curator comments that age is a significant criterion:

> I truly believe that ... [quality] is based in how one feels when they walk out of a museum. But I'm not sure that that's really true; quality is a word that's laden with a lot of assumptions, and there are museums that I've walked out of and said, ‘‘That was just the best museum I've ever been in,’’ but I wouldn't call them quality museums. I went to a dog-collar museum in Leed's Castle in England back in the 80 s that was just great. I could tell you every single piece that was on exhibit – I remember them so clearly. It was a fantastic experience, but I wouldn't call it a quality museum. I don't know why not. Maybe I should, but it's funny to say that a dog-collar museum is high-quality, because when you use the word quality, you tend to think of the hallowed halls of an ancient and respectable place. (R4, curator)

The curator's remarks point to the notion of culture as process, and illustrates how the passage of time affects perceptions of an organization's symbolic worth. Others talk about human resources being a key component of museum quality, such as this educator:

> Well, I think because I'm an insider, the first things I think about are inside things, like a museum that really works as a team, where everyone has different skills and experiences, but they're respected for those skills and experiences, and they're expected to bring those skills and experiences to the table, so that the whole can be stronger than the parts. Now, personally, I think that when that happens, then on the outside, the measurements for

> success are that you see a museum that is vibrant and dynamic, even if the collection doesn't change, so the community – the potential audience – sees it as a place where interesting things are happening, there's an open discussion about ideas through a variety of formats, where people of all sorts are welcome, and welcome to participate in the discussion. Those are my idealistic viewpoints – that if it's working on the inside, then it will reflect on the outside. (R8)

This comment highlights the brokerage work done by professionals. For the educator, museum quality is a means for public uplift, not an end unto itself. A director at a different museum makes a similar point:

> A first rate art museum – now, in my mind – is one that has great collections that are important, that's a museum that has very good facilities, it's a museum that has very strong programs that it establishes with clear-cut goals and objectives, and it measures whether or not those are being met, including exhibitions. But above all, it's a museum that actually is dedicated to using all of those resources and assets to actually having an impact on how people live, how they see themselves, how they see other people [. . .] (R14, director)

But the director's comments differ from the educator's in that they give priority to certain criteria rather than commensurating them as equally relevant. The director's thoughts about mission adherence and organizational functioning are clearly subservient to the rhetoric of the organization as public servant, as an instrument of social good. In doing so, director R13, like R14, draws a boundary between museum insiders and the viewing public.

Fig. 1 describes the distribution of criteria discussed. Across interviews, the majority of respondents invoked aesthetic criteria related to the artwork as the dominant principle structuring their interpretation of organizational quality, followed by attention to audiences, elements of professional practice, and organizational attributes. Consistent with research on organizations, discussions of status and inter-organizational relationships contribute a small, but recognizable number of criteria.

In comparing respondents, there were several significant differences in how role categories (curator, director, administrator) and museum identification were associated with different criteria. Gender is associated with role, with directors tending to be men. Adherence to mission was associated with directors and administrators. Only professionals at the encyclopedic and destination museums associated attendance in their definition of quality; both curators at one of the college museums in the sample associated quality with staff reputation. These associations may be artifactual, given the sample size, yet the overall lack of a unified organizational or role-bound voice is worth noting.

Similarly, while the sample here is perhaps too small to permit inference to the entire world of museum professionals, we also observe meaningful variation even in rough classifications of similarities in the content and form of responses. For instance, one group of respondents ($n = 5$) contains individuals with uniform agreement that the facilities and different instantiations of the artwork matter the most. A second group ($n = 6$) describes people who prioritize the collections and public; a third ($n = 3$) is comprised of those who balance internal criteria (exhibitions, acquisitions, scholarship, mission) with external criteria (visitor experience, museum reputation). The remaining individuals ($n = 4$) appear to have no clear patterning of criteria.

Another way to classify professionals concerns the form of their responses, and here this task is aided by comparing individuals' mental models. Following Porac et al. (1989), the structure of

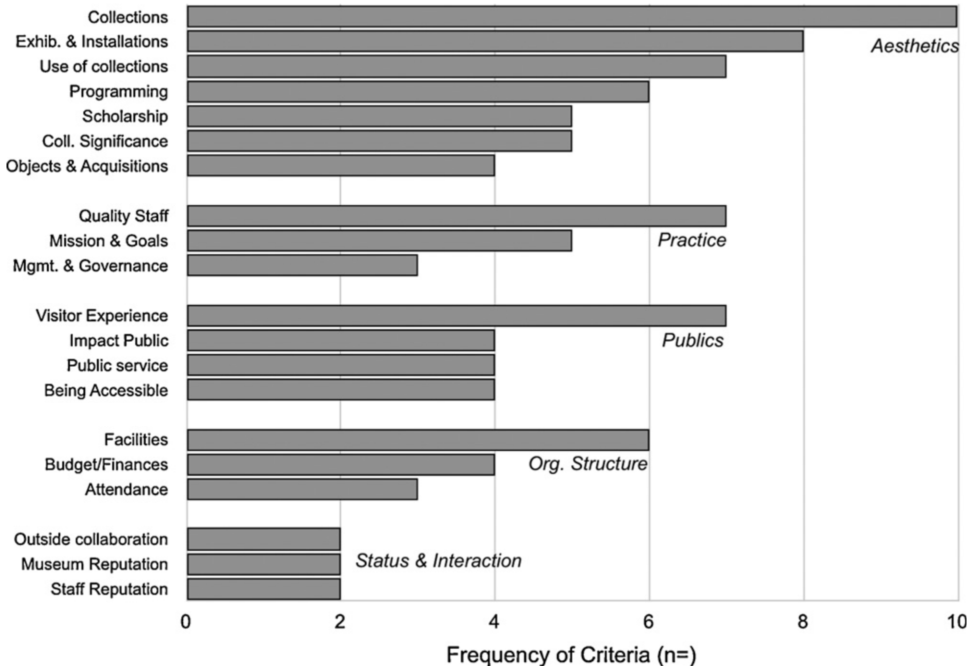

Fig. 1. Quality criteria.

a professional's quality narrative quality is transformed into a graphical representation. Fig. 2 visualizes two such models, which were coded by the author from respondent narratives. In general, the majority of individuals ($n = 7$) describe primary and secondary criteria, suggesting a cognitive hierarchy. Another group ($n = 5$) appear to commensurate criteria with no clear indication of priority. A minority ($n = 3$) are adamant that the importance of the artwork collections to museum quality is inseparable from how those collections are used. A last group ($n = 3$) of the same size emphasizes that museum quality is only a means to serve the public good. There is no significant association between the form of response and the content of responses, nor with role or museum.

Given the limited scope of this project, it would be unwise to interpret either classification of form or content beyond two different ways of describing variation in responses to questions about quality. However, these methods do allow us to discern a modest amount of similarity between responses, suggesting that while characterizations of quality are not tightly associated with either professional role or museum, perceptions of quality are also not highly individualistic.

4.2. *Explicit quality comparison*

Respondents often used a comparative frame to illustrate a point about their own organization, or to comment specifically on another museum. In doing so, they often signaled implicit status hierarchies, and status norms became apparent from talk of peer institutions. For example, labels of ''low quality'' were typically avoided in reference to one's own museum or other museums.

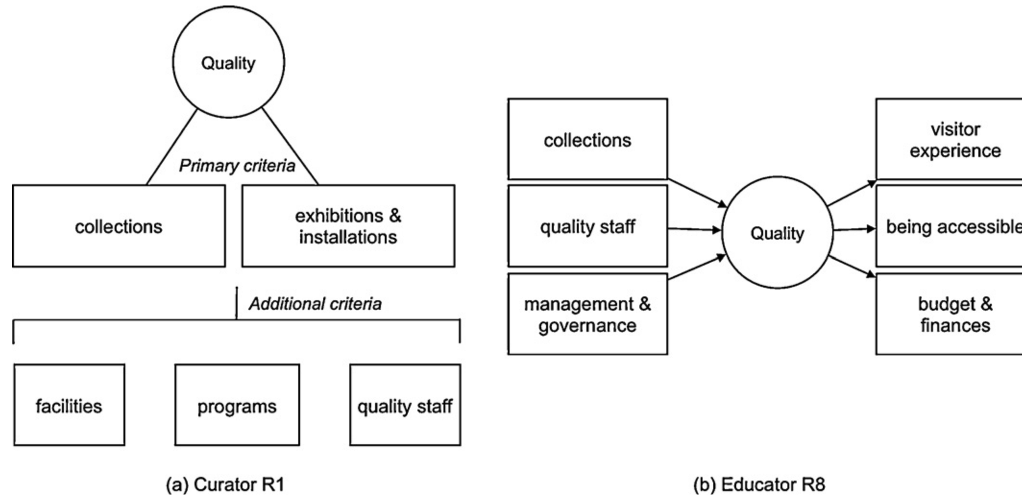

Fig. 2. Similarities in professionals by cognitive taxonomy.

Individuals often used variations on a phrase like "that museum's collections are excellent, but their public program has been lacking recently." Phrases like "questionable," "uneven," "not as cutting edge," "problematic," "spotty," "challenged," and "moribund," all make reference to elements of low quality without unilaterally condemning a museum. Others were more explicit about hierarchy, as comments from the following curator (R1) and director (R15) attest:

> The Met [The Metropolitan Museum of Art] is the gold standard; it's the Rolls Royce. It's a little overwhelming, though; it's so big. . . and everything was of such high quality. You know, they could do things that nobody else could do – that [museum] and the National Gallery [of Art]. (R1)

> Let me just say I wouldn't say this, but the Metropolitan is a museum of quality, and the Guggenheim is not as it currently stands [. . .] I would say the [Isabella Stewart] Gardner [Museum] is, and the [Boston] MFA is not, as it currently stands – in their programming. I mean, it's hard to say because in the collections, a place can have enormous quality in the collections, and yet the public program can be moribund, or of very little quality. (R15)

Respondents would often commensurate museums, as a registrar (R6), curator (R11), and director (R16) each do:

> Our collection is not as large, but our program and our exhibition program I would say is on a par with Yale [University Art Gallery], and the Clark. We borrow from all of the major institutions: the National Gallery [of Art] . . . LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], St. Louis [Museum of Art], the Phillips [Collection]. . . (R6)

> . . . [Our museum] doesn't have the storyline of Western art with later accretions of Asian stuff that the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts], the Met, the Chicago Art Institute, LACMA, you know, all of the major art museums [that] have that similar kind of structure. (R11)

> The peer institutions, really, are I suppose, the MFA, the Metropolitan, MoMA [Museum of Modern Art], the National Gallery, [Art Institute of] Chicago, Philadelphia [Museum of Art], and then, in terms of collections, you'd say Detroit [Institute of Arts Museum], Cleveland [Museum of Art], Los Angeles County Museum, but their circumstances are somewhat different. . . (R16)

For these professionals, the boundary between major and non-major museum is salient, as are the boundaries separating fields of specialization. Time is also connected to comparative perceptions of quality. A director relates that, "I was talking to someone about the Phoenix Art Museum in Phoenix. I'm very forgiving about Phoenix, which for me was L.A. thirty or forty years ago, which was also the Met a hundred years before that. . ." (R13). In contrast, a curator makes the point that the sequence and context in which we experience museums matters a great deal to how we construct comparative notions of quality:

> What I really do value about all of these places is that, well, most of those places, is that you can go and make acquaintance with an object over and over and over and over again, seeing it afresh . . .seeing it in a context of experiences that will be changing. If you go to the Frick Collection after being at the Met, it's a very different thing than if you go to the Frick Collection after being at the Neue Gallerie. . . (R3)

As with discussions around dimensions of an absolute idea of quality, temporality also has a strong place in discussions of relative quality.

The fact that different individuals would compare different organizations in conversation prompted the question of whether there were identifiable patterns in these comparisons. To enable systematic comparisons across individuals, I asked a subsample of these professionals ($n = 11$) to take part in a cognitive experiment. This subsample was determined by exigencies of the experiment design. Because the pile-sort experiment was only designed to be conducted in person, it excludes those few respondents interviewed over the phone. Moreover, because the experiment required approximately 10 min to complete, respondents who allocated more time for our interview were those who had time to take part. There was no relationship between professional status or type of museum and propensity to take part in the experiment.

In the experiment, each person was asked to arrange a random sample of 29 cards with museum names drawn from the approximately 180 member museums of the American Association of Museum Directors (AAMD), an invitation-only branch of the American Museum Association (AAM). Participants were given directions to arrange the museums in a way that made sense to them, and thus forced to make quality distinctions between entities of ostensibly already-high quality (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1983; Weller and Romney, 1988). Individuals' classifications were then transformed into proximity matrices of similarities, which could then be aggregated and visualized using a multi-dimensional scaling algorithm (Foster et al., 2011; Kruskal and Wish, 1978). Holding this population of museums constant enables evaluation of the question, ''Do individuals classify the same museums in similar ways?'' If each respondent's arrangement of museums is idiosyncratic, we should observe a random scatterplot.

After I described the experimental procedure, director R10 politely responded with a chuckle that what I was attempting to do seemed akin to a cocktail-party game – in that the stakes were low for participants (because of guaranteed anonymity), and that it was always interesting to gossip about one's peers. But after a pause, the director admitted to this type of subtle ''sizing-up'' as something that he and his museum field colleagues do in their daily practice, even if they may not always admit to it.

The metaMDS implementation of non-metric MDS in R yielded a stress statistic of 0.037 given a low dimensionality of three, which is considered an adequate goodness-of-fit (Kruskal and Wish, 1978). The subsample here is sufficient for this procedure, though simulation research comparing the robustness of MDS algorithms given varying sample sizes demonstrates that increasing the sample size also improves the fit of the solution (Bijmolt and Wedel, 1999). Fig. 3 reports the configuration of proximities, with group boundaries determined by visual inspection as a rough guide to interpretation.[3]

According to one interpretation of these similarities, Group 1 tends to capture encyclopedic museums in major metropolitan areas, while Group 2 describes specialized and contemporary art museums. Because one group (Group 3) identifies a single college art museum, we might expect

[3] Group 1. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Brooklyn Museum, Worcester Museum of Art, Frick Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Nelson-Atkins Museum; Group 2. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, El Museo del Barrio, and Albright-Knox Gallery, Norman Rockwell Museum, the National Academy of Design; Group 3. Smith College Museum of Art; Group 4. Ackland Art Museum (Univ. North Carolina), Columbus Museum of Art, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Indiana University Art Museum, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Museo Franz Mayer, National Museum of African Art, Orlando Museum of Art, Palm Springs Desert Museum, Palmer Museum of Art (Penn State), Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art (Univ. of Florida), and Wichita Art Museum.

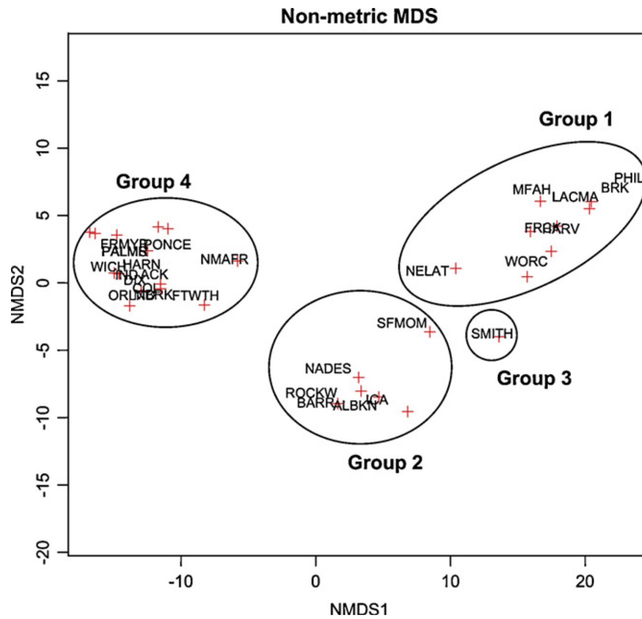

Fig. 3. Multi-dimensional scaling of museum pile-sort.

Indiana, Ackland, Harn, and Palmer to group there as well. But most respondents diverted these museums to the uncertain category (Group 4), where museums largely fall outside the geography of the major American art hubs. Follow-up discussions with respondents revealed that, respondents seemed to classify museums they were familiar with, and placed less recognized organizations into this residual category. Three museums (Smith College, Nelson-Atkins, and SFMOMA) are not easily fit into either the first or second group, suggesting they posed some challenges in easy classification for respondents.

While the MDS configuration was determined by how respondents physically arranged museums, triangulation with publicly available organization tax returns suggests a high degree of correspondence between respondents' cognitive groups and the rank-ordering of financial statistics (see Appendix B). We should not be surprised that when placed in a situation where comparison is requested, individuals will compare. What is unexpected is the measurable degree of consistency in how people simplify, indicating some degree of shared bias in how people cognitively classify organizations.

4.3. Inter-organizational relationships and quality

Museum professionals also routinely interact with their peers at other organizations, and discussed how these interactions relate with their evaluations of quality. A series of questions probed how interaction, collaboration, and competition played out in respondents' work. In general, respondents describe the museum field as a web of mutual interdependence. Interaction ranges from artwork loans with relatively few obligations to a far closer form of collaboration such as jointly creating, organizing, and traveling an exhibition to multiple cities. Museums

might partner on research, an education program, or with local civic groups. Respondents describe how their ability of museum professionals to call in favors from colleagues in museums across the country is part of the informal currency by which the field operates. Though much of the interaction between other organizations has to do with mutual esteem, it is also associated with their realities that they may have to ask a favor from a colleague at another institution. A curator (R5) and director (R16) discuss public motivations for artwork loans:

> Museums as institutions are unique. I mean, we're collection-based, so our collaborations always – or not always, but ultimately – spring out of the collections, and the need for us to share collections with each other and through exhibitions. And it's not just exhibitions, either; there are also projects that we undertake that are collaboratively research-based, or education programs, but, ultimately, they all kind of spring out of studying original works of art. . . (R5)

> [U]ndoubtedly, it's great to give people the opportunity here [in our city] to see things they might not otherwise see. It's certainly the case that some of our wealthiest supporters can see anything anywhere in the world, but I think it's great that less affluent people, people who aren't so mobile, can see something fabulous in any context here. Often bringing an object in throws light on things that we have, or fills a real deficiency in this museum, or in this community, so you can carry on listing reasons, but there are benefits. (R16)

While a registrar (R6) – whose job is to facilitate loans – sees reciprocity as a tool for smoothing interactions, a director observes erosion of this process:

> [Y]ou just don't lend to anybody who wants to borrow something in your collection, and at [my prior job], one of the pre-requisites was that it would be something that would enrich the history of the object, or if it would be an institution that we did a lot of borrowing from, there's some political issues come into it. Like, if "Museum X" wanted to borrow something from "Museum Y," and then "Y" wanted to borrow something from "X," they might be a little bit more collegial about lending – not that the standards would be thrown out the window, but it makes a difference. (R6)

> The field has gone from a barter-driven, informal, "I will loan you my Goya if you give me your Rembrandt down the line" to what are today, numbers. MoMA started to charge a million dollars for shows outright, and this begat a way of thinking about shows which is not commensurate with the value of the artwork or scholarship. (R19)

Though the reciprocity norms discussed by these professionals are pervasive throughout the field, they are also sensitive to local variation and dependent upon the history between two institutions and sometimes on the interpersonal history between two people. The transition observed by the director – of artwork loans changing from an informal practice to a more structured arrangement – harmonizes with what scholars have theorized as the increasing legitimation of an artistic field of practice (Baumann, 2007; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993).

While many curators emphasize the creative nature of partnerships with other museums, directors tend to discuss the difficulties and challenges that emerge, describing that a great deal of lip service is paid to collaborations without deeper understanding of how it affects organizations. As a curator offers, successful partnerships require both parties to contribute resources:

> A lot of it has to do with capabilities, and that's why it's budget-related in some ways, because it has to do with an institution having the infrastructure to be a partner in projects. If you try to work with a museum that doesn't have any staff, for example, there's little that they can bring to the table in terms of being a partner in some kind of collaboration. A lot of smaller museums don't have the same kinds of facilities. They don't have the same kinds of budgets for exhibitions; every level of the programming stems to some extent to the overall size of the institution's resources, and then at a certain level, I think there are tiers. [...] There can be collaboration, of course, back and forth between smaller and larger institutions, but the more disparate the resources, the more unlikely it is that there can be a successful collaboration. (R5)

This curator ultimately sees collaborative success as tied to organization size, but the boundary between large and small museum is not as consequential as that between organizations with and without complementary resources. Moreover, the very idea of working together across organization boundaries can be very different in theory and in practice. Two directors allude to a common gap between the expectation of partnership and its reality:

> I always assume that by collaborating things will improve, that everybody will clap, but it doesn't always occur that way. True collaboration is actually quite difficult. We often in our collaborations offer money, and then we don't get much back in return, so... there often is an environment where collaboration is not possible or not easily attained given what other external forces are forcing your staff to deal with...the point is it's easy to talk about, and it's easy to point at, it's easy to recommend, but it's very difficult to do. (R13)

> There are lots of collaborations that we're in the process of working out with a variety of museums. At the same time, I don't see that – you don't actually get a whole lot of creativity out of those. You get what you sort of bring to it, but you don't get a lot of 'new' – in my experience – creativity there. And the reason for that is that we've got vested strategic interests and tactical interests in what we're doing, and they have vested interests in what they're doing, and we've got our curators, and they've got their curators, and it'd be nice to think that the world worked that way, but it actually doesn't. (R14)

The directors' comments shed light on the workings of a generally understudied phenomenon, namely, how interaction between multiple gatekeepers contributes to the production of culture. Here, we get insight into the pragmatic difficulties that arise in the process of merging visions and executing a creative idea. Related to curator R5's prior observation, we can see how the ease or difficulty with which this organizational interaction occurs undoubtedly contributes to the success not just of a current collaboration, but also affects the propensity for future partnerships.

Another interaction dynamic is competition between museums within the field. Some individuals spoke bluntly about how competition was a necessary reality. One director affirmed, "We compete for resources, for the public, and for works of art. We're always calculating, 'How are we going to get that? How do we convince this donor?' That's a huge amount of what I do. I debase myself daily" (R17, director). As a curator puts it, "We try to say we're not in competition, but all museums are in competition; strongly in competition just for attendance" (R4). Others distanced themselves from explicit involvement in competition with variations upon, "I'm sure there is competition, but not in what I do. It must happen *somewhere else* in the organization." One director is more equivocal:

> No. I don't think [we're in competition] at all. Even with [Museum] who, for example, are raising, you know, four or five hundred million dollars to do their projects, and we have to raise a hundred and fifty million to do our project. . . that's part of the level where they're in competition. Competition's probably not the right word, but clearly that if they weren't doing that, it would be easier for us to raise the money. But in the program, in audience area, it's really "more is more." (R15)

The director's comments reveal some of the ways that collaborative and competitive dynamics are mutually consequential, as museums are multi-faceted organizations with multiple points of interaction and multiple objectives. While a majority of professionals may adhere to a rhetoric of collaboration as both necessary for operations and enriching for the public, we also see that collaboration is bound to pragmatic obligations. Competition is discussed by different parties as both irrelevant and a key structuring dynamic of the field. As these conversations attest, how museums interact – working with and against one another in certain ways – shape professionals' perceptions of quality.

4.4. Pathways of influence

There are additional informal structures that shape perceptions of quality as professionals are socialized into the museum field. Asked about other types of relationships that structure interactions, several respondents alluded to the role of alumni networks in professional life:

> If somebody that I know is going to do a really interesting project comes to seek a loan, I'm going to be more inclined to say, "This is something we ought to support" if I believe the project is going to be worthwhile, and that we will learn about an aspect of nineteenth century American art, and that this is the best person to bring this body of material together. The way that I think all museums are, I trust my friends and I believe that the friends that I have in professional positions are generally the folks who do extraordinarily good work. We talk to one another most of the time about the work of our colleagues, we have a pretty good sense, I think, of whose work is in sync with our sense of how the discipline develops best and whose work is not, and there's a gentle stratification that happens as a result of that. (R3, Curator)

The stratification observed by the curator harmonizes with a key sociological insight that mechanisms of homophily and preferential attachment shape inequalities in networks (McPherson et al., 2001; Moody, 2004). But these informal networks are complemented by more formal network structures in the museum field as well. In conversation, professionals identified two alumni networks as especially influential: the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and the Williams College Museum of Art. The former had faculty who often had professional appointments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, while the latter was noted as an important training ground for a generation of leaders in the museum field from the 1970s onward. A curator explains further,

> Most museum directors and curators at the big museums were Williams graduates, or have been until very recently. So there's Rusty Powell at the National Gallery, there was James Wood at the Chicago Art Institute [. . .] Bob Buck was at Brooklyn – he's not there anymore, but recently Kirk Varnedoe at the Modern, Glen Lowry at the Modern, Tom Krens at the Guggenheim; it just goes on and on. There's just many, many museum directors who came out of Williams, and it's credited to the teaching of Lane Faison and

> Whitney Stoddard and Bill Pearson – all three of whom believed in teaching from objects; it was really based on – an education based on connoisseurship. (R1)

Several respondents discussed the role of the Getty Leadership Institute (GLI, formerly Museum Management Institute) as a forum where for several weeks every year since 1979, thirty to thirty-five ‘‘up-and-coming’’ figures gather for networking, trading ideas, and discussing the state of the field. Others mentioned the Association of American Museum Directors (AAMD) as helping to shape practice in the field.

Less formalized affiliations also appear to hold sway in inter-organizational relations. One director (R19) explained that since 1995 there has been an informal group with no bylaws or charter, but who essentially ‘‘controlled who got what exhibitions.’’ This group had no formal vetting process but was, ‘‘the sort of thing where meetings were conducted in airport lounges; a kind of Masonic lodge-type club.’’ The director explained that this group had about 50 or 60 museums, 11 or 12 of which were U.S. members, and commented that, ‘‘all the obvious ones – the Metropolitan Museum, Boston MFA, Cleveland, Houston, San Francisco, Getty – rank one another in terms of number of masterpieces floating back and forth. That cartel – and I use the word cartel – is where decisions were made, and what they do is reify what used to be a club; they now discuss matters of policy.’’ As another curator at a different museum concludes, the ‘‘old boy network. . . is still in effect, to a real tangible degree’’(R3). While analysis of the composition and change in formal and informal museum networks is beyond the scope of this paper, discussions with professionals suggest that we might expect some of the same mechanisms that generate inequality in other organizational settings to apply here as well.

5. Discussion

Recent social scientific insights demonstrate that relational processes of classification, cognition, and status appraisal are linked to perceptions of organization quality. This perspective on valuation stands in stark contrast to discourse in museum literature that highlights aesthetic criteria while obscuring relational processes. This apparent disconnect motivated a desire to scrutinize how key actors in the field arrive at their understandings of museum quality, and how professional interactions are related with perceptions of other organizations. To investigate these questions, a diverse group of museum professionals were enlisted to offer their perspectives on quality. One component of interviews involved asking individuals to define what the abstract concept of quality meant to them. In doing so, respondents de-constructed the abstraction into more concrete dimensions. The distribution of these dimensions was tabulated across the sample, and similarities between individuals’ responses were analyzed. A separate component of interviews revolved around the theme of comparative quality. Respondents were asked to reflect upon museums of similar quality. To enable explicit comparison of the same set of museums across respondents, a pile-sort exercise was administered to a subset of respondents. Last, questions about relationships between organizations provided insight into ways in which individuals interact with professional peers.

Not surprisingly, museum professionals report that aesthetics, professional practice, audience considerations, and an organization’s structural criteria guide their judgments of museum quality, with aesthetic criteria taking a leading role. The relatively scant discussion of collaboration and reputation suggest that although these criteria play a part, it is not a part that respondents strongly associate with quality. Still, because there is little extant qualitative evidence of how any of these symbolic distinctions are made by art professionals in the context of the museum field,

understanding these distinctions at the level of granularity shown here contributes to the broader project of understanding how these evaluations can have tangible effects on social structures. One clear area of tension for respondents hinged on resource inequalities between museums, which raises productive questions regarding shifting opportunities for individuals to engage with visual culture. Symbolic boundaries constrain and enable opportunities for action, and shape more durable social inequalities (DiMaggio, 1987; Lamont, 2009).

Another area of tension revolved around the boundary between professionals and the public. More specifically, respondents saw some part of a museum's quality as related to how it serves the public, and a part from how professionals contribute to the organization. Though this paper focuses chiefly on voices of museum insiders, a question emerges as to how value constructed by professionals in the field of museums might permeate the public sphere and affect how we, as cultural consumers, experience art museums; it seems plausible, even likely that some meanings are shared between domains. Museum professionals do not work in a vacuum – they are also members of the artgoing public, albeit with highly specialized training in aesthetic distinctions, and they interact with family, friends, students, and other professionals outside their field. Second, museum professionals serve as gatekeepers to working artists as well as the press.

Establishing how individuals' set of cultural meanings of quality are related with a field-level set of cultural elements complements the project of understanding how an organization's cultural toolkit is linked to the broader dynamics of the field (Weber, 2005). Though status and interaction had little role in how the abstract notion of quality is defined by museum professionals, there is abundant evidence that perceptions of quality shape their propensity to commensurate and rank organizations. Discourse on comparison along with the experimental comparison exercise provides insight into the cognitive processes by which professionals order their worlds. Together, the finding of similarities in how people evaluate quality criteria, as well as the finding of similarities in how people classify museums harmonizes with research at the intersection of culture and cognition, providing additional evidence that both conscious and subconscious cognition interacts with social context to inform behavior (Vaisey, 2008). As Srivastava and Banaji (2011) demonstrate, some workplace decisions are in part related to a less conscious part of our cognition. Though a majority of evidence in the present study was narrative and the only clear ''action'' emerged from a low-stakes classification experiment, the finding of similar types of classification schemes suggest implicitly shared criteria of worth.

These findings extend research on organizational status orders and how identities are shaped (Lynn et al., 2009; Podolny, 1993; Zuckerman, 1999) by adding a great deal of qualitative depth to how people actively wrestle with quality uncertainty within organizations. The finding that individuals relate quality to both subjective attributes and objective structure adds to the work of Labianca et al. (2001) by demonstrating how inter-organizational comparison is highly keyed to aesthetic criteria, reputation, and inter-personal relationships, but also to structural attributes such as budget, building size, age, and attendance. While LaBianca and colleagues show that members of a field tend to mimic successful elite organizations, this research finds that field members, regardless of museum type, also share common challenges that require local responses based upon an organization's capabilities and resources. Imitation may certainly be occurring in a variety of ways, but the explicit and implicit organizational commensuration by respondents does not, by itself, provide evidence of mimicry. The finding that professionals in different organizational roles have different evaluative criteria accords with research by Ng et al. (2009), though the lack of patterning within roles suggests more individualistic preferences.

A unique contribution of this study lies in the explication of different kinds of interactions between organizations (lending, joint exhibitions, research collaborations, public programs) and

showing how this type of relationality shapes quality evaluations. This descriptive work is enriched by discussion of the reasons museums undertake these activities, and their rewards and perils. In doing so, this study adds breadth to prior work on organizational relationships among art world actors. In particular, these findings add to Yogev's taxonomy of key market relations (2010) by giving attention to another form of exchange, namely museum–museum interaction. The salience of structures such as alumni networks, professional associations, and social clubs to professionals harmonizes with what we know of mechanisms of social influence that affect both perceptions of quality and status allocation, from socialization of a power elite (Mills, 1956), to embeddedness in invisible colleges (Crane, 1969), to preferential attachment (Merton, 1968). Elaborating relationships between different organizations adds to our understanding of how the museum field operates, thereby giving detail to the structure of struggles over meaning in the arts (Bourdieu et al., 1991; Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). While a comprehensive assessment of links between these relational structures and status orders among museums would be illuminating, it is beyond the scope of this paper. This preliminary work suggests that more rigorous investigation of connections between organizations over time may bear fruit (Oliver and Ebers, 1998; Sammarra and Biggiero, 2008).

There are limitations to what might be inferred from these findings. As Martin (2010) theorizes in a recent exploration of culture and cognition, the complexity of our social life emerges from the connections we make – both the connections between ideas in our heads and also from our human interactions with others. Martin is skeptical of how much we can learn about culture through interview-based approaches, arguing that large parts of culture are not shared, and a great deal of culture lies unused. This study, in contrast, proceeds from the idea that interviews with individuals do not simply express private, idiosyncratic perspectives, but shared, actionable collective representations. Though this study demonstrates the value of tracing both cognitive connections and real-world connections, findings from a small-N interview-based study should be seen as suggestive, and a starting point for further research (Lieberson, 1991).

Perspectives of professionals from beyond the northeastern United States would certainly add additional scope and richness to the views presented here. Because of the preponderance of college museums in the northeast, this sample included slightly more college museum professionals than from other types of museum. It is possible that this biased findings, though there was not evidence to suggest that either the content or form of their quality evaluations extensively differed from colleagues at other institutions.

6. Conclusions

Art museums shape how visual culture is not only represented in the moment, but also shaped for future generations. Further, museums are socially, economically, and culturally valuable. A vibrant museum scene signals a city's creative vitality, attracting tourism, and constructing cultural heritage. How museums and other forms of arts organizations are evaluated critically affect their viability. Yet the findings in this study reach beyond the visual and performing arts. After all, museums share similarities with a broad class of organizations outside the that are experienced by consumers; who have critics that publicly review their performance; and which are not solely (or even primarily) evaluated using economic criteria. The viability of organizations such as restaurants, hospitals, and universities, for instance, all depend to some degree on evaluations of their quality. In our experience with these organizations, uncertainty prompts most of us to reach beyond personal knowledge. We tend to defer to professional evaluations, and often trust an expert in the medical profession for healthcare counsel, a teacher

for college advice, or the friend who works in a kitchen for help making dinner plans or restaurant recommendations.

From the present study, we observe that artwork dominates rhetoric surrounding professional quality judgments, and still these assessments are quite complex and frequently uncertain. We may be tempted to presume that the predominant axis of quality in hospitals is health care, in universities learning, and in restaurants the food they serve. But we should not be surprised when a far more nuanced picture emerges, one that richly captures the complexity of our shared lives.

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Appendix A

Universal survey museums, colloquially known as ''encyclopedic'' or ''superstar'' museums, collect widely and deeply, and are usually located in major metropolitan areas (Frey, 1998; Wallach, 1998). While it is tempting to think of regional museums as universal survey museums on a smaller scale, there are also important differences, chief of which is less reliance upon tourist attention, more investment from the local community, and frequently more of an educational orientation. Specialized museums are typically devoted to one genre or subfield of art (Tonelli, 1990). Private/House museums are privately held collections usually intended to remain static, or at least to maintain the appearance of doing so (Higgonet, 2003). College museums are located on a school's campus, and destination museums are seen as tourist magnets, often located outside major metropolitan areas. I am grateful to pilot respondents for confirming the validity of this typology and suggesting the inclusion of ''destination'' museums, which I had not previously considered.

Appendix B

Table B1 reports means of financial indicators from the available tax returns of these museums in the three years prior to data-collection in 2005 (Guidestar.org, 2006). We observe that Group 1

Table B1
Financial characteristics of museums within MDS groups.

Group	Income ($)	Membership ($)	Program ($)	Endowment ($)	Attendance ($)	Director ($)
1	50,981,500	3,018,568	5,581,411	317,011,122	1,537,317	238,352
2	9,092,475	928,699	2,759,129	71,750,831	1,519,530	271,204
4	3,638,321	398,203	494,102	30,966,209	350,088	188,719

has the largest income, endowment, program spending, membership revenue, and director's salary. In five of six financial indicators, the mean value (in US dollars) of each group corresponds to MDS clusters, with Group 1 being highest, and Group 4 the lowest.

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