

WORLDVIEWS, CLUSTERS, AND INTUITIVE EPISTEMOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

A 2020 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



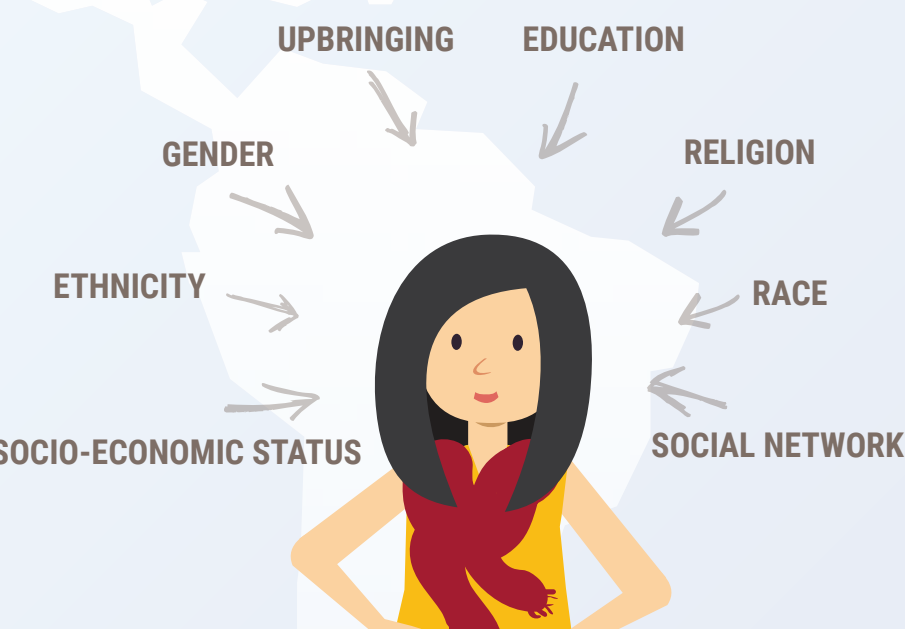
Everyone is different. We all know that.



And that extends to our visitors. Each one comes in with their own idiosyncratic blend of values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect how they engage with the content museums share.

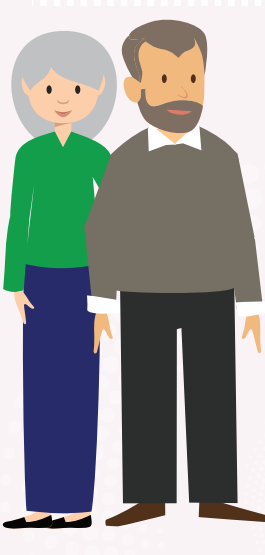
So let's step back and see how this affects learning in museums (and elsewhere).

Our values, attitudes, and beliefs are influenced by a number of factors, including:



These values, attitudes, and beliefs (we'll call them "worldviews," for short) thus combine in different ways for each individual person. But when we look across the population, we tend to find patterns that form two main clusters ... and these patterns and clusters reflect the polarization in our society.

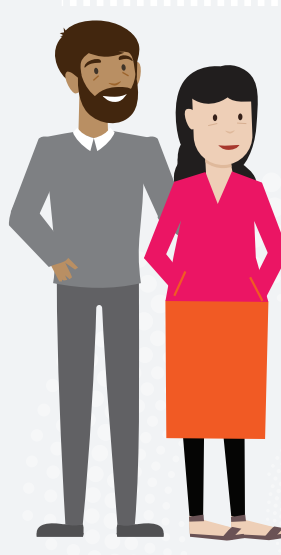
TRADITIONALS: More likely to have these traits



- Status quo (not seeking or rejecting inclusion) or non-inclusive
- Politically/socially conservative
- Somewhat less engaged with museums and culture
- Generally less engagement with community, broader world
- Museums should be neutral

- Traditional, often celebratory approach to history and their own culture; pride in past and own cultural heritage
- Somewhat less curious
- Demographically: tend to be older, more male, less educational attainment

NEOTERIC: More likely to have these traits

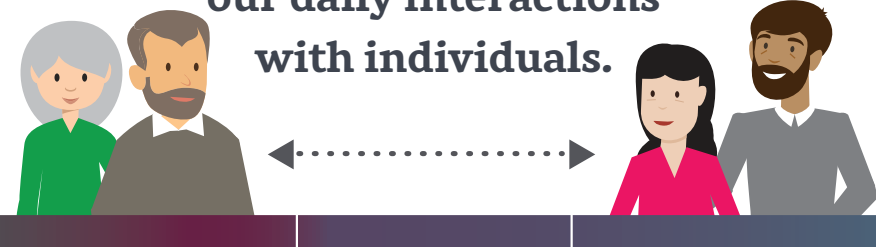


- Inclusive (some status quo)
- Politically/socially liberal
- Somewhat more engaged with museums and culture
- Generally more engagement with community, broader world
- Museums can take an evidence-backed position
- Additive approach to history and culture; curious about other cultures and worldviews

- More curious (especially eudaemonic curiosity)
- Demographically: tend to be younger, more female, more educational attainment

Neoteric: adjective that describes new or modern ideas; from the Greek neos, for new

This results in a spectrum of values, attitudes, and beliefs that we have to understand holistically, but then respond to flexibly in our daily interactions with individuals.

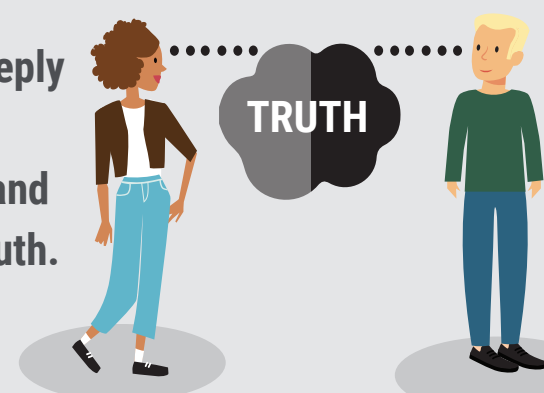


CAVEAT!

Not everyone falls neatly into a cluster! Since every individual is idiosyncratic, one person can largely fall into one cluster, but still have a trait or two from the other. So it is NOT appropriate to make assumptions about individual visitors ... especially based on demographic markers.

But do worldviews affect how people engage with our content? After all, facts are facts, right? **Wrong!**

Our worldviews deeply affect how we approach content and what we view as truth.



How?

A Theory of Intuitive Epistemology:¹ a process and study of establishing facts that acknowledges how individual values and life experiences deeply affect the questions individuals ask of a subject, and thus the answers (facts) found.

Everyone practices intuitive epistemology all the time. The questions we ask of the past, science, social issues, and art all vary based on our worldviews. And when we ask different questions of museum content, we then use that content to find answers that validate our individual worldviews, ignoring content that creates dissonance.

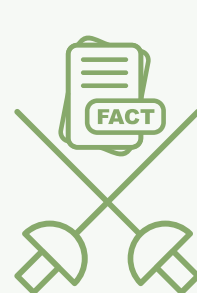


This is how two people can approach a single topic, such as climate change or the Civil War, and come to radically different conclusions.



All of us. It is human nature.

Which is why the dueling facts that result only further divide us and feed into a culture of alternative facts, polarization, and cancellation.



So what do we do about this?

To start, we have to deploy **radical curiosity** and **courageous empathy** in our practice.

By striving to understand those different worldviews, and what shaped them, we can anticipate how they will respond to the content we wish to share.



That more complex understanding can then be used to help visitors ask new questions that just might broaden their worldviews in ways that matter.



To be continued ...

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
 • 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
 • 2020 Broader Population Sampling
 • 2020 Online Pandemic Panel of Museum-Goers (ongoing)
 • 2017 - 2019 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

¹Intuitive epistemology comes from *One Nation, Two Realities: Dueling Facts in American Democracy*, by Morgan Marietta and David C. Barker.

*Data Stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.