research questions
How do families learn together in the museum?
How do families use museum exhibits, artifacts and specimens in their conversations, problem-solving and task engagement?
What are the kinds of social interactions between family members that support, or do not support, learning?
Do stated expectations for museums explain actual engagement in museum activities?

methods
- Ethnographic shadowing of museum exploration
- Video interaction analysis
- Pre- and post- family interviews

subjects
Families with children in elementary school. Two groups:
- PRACTICED USERS: Museum-going families whose children attend museum summer camps
- NEWCOMERS: Families from community centers; non-members who do not send children to museum programs

abstract
This research project considers the learning and interactions that occur when families come together to engage in a scientific conversation or to solve a problem during museum visits. I use a socio-cultural framework to study these activities as a family social practice. By studying families doing museum science activities as a family social practice, I analyze the norms, skills, language, identities, and social interactions that family members develop or draw upon to organize their activities alongside the families’ interactions with scientific content, pedagogy, and artifacts. Examining the museum visit in this manner, I explore how families learn science together in a museum, how they determine what science is, and what they consider to be appropriate learning activities.

Findings include (1) family members led the visit navigation for different purposes; (2) different kinds of teaching observed include use of personal narrative, reading museum texts, and use of gesture and body positioning to enrich the conversation; and (3) live animal exhibits often prompted family conversations around issues of gender.

future lines of inquiry
(1) What do the activities of families suggest for the design of learning environments?
(2) Do experienced museum-going families have different learning strategies compared to first-time museum-going families? What are these strategies, and can they be leveraged to create more effective museum exhibits?
(3) Based on their interactions, do families have gendered learning outcomes?

selected references

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However, all opinions expressed are strictly my own.

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