Traditional Storytelling in the Digital Era

Janelle Palacios, CNM

ABSTRACT

As a population, American Indian and Alaskan Native people have poorer overall health status when compared to other Americans. Due to a history of colonization and continued marginalization, a movement to bring forth traditional knowledge and practice, while reaffirming power over how a people are researched, has evoked a new orientation to researching wellness among indigenous people. The aim of this article is to situate the oral tradition of storytelling in the digital era as a research technique and intervention that can help Native and non-Native investigators meet American Indian health needs.

KEY WORDS: *Native, American Indian, Indigenous, Storytelling, Oral Traditions, Digital Storytelling, Health Care, Culture*

INTRODUCTION

As a population, American Indian and Alaskan Native (termed American Indian, Native, and indigenous throughout this article) people have poorer overall health status when compared to other Americans. American Indians have lower life expectancy and die at higher rates than other Americans from tuberculosis, alcoholism, diabetes, unintentional injuries, homicides and suicides(Indian Health Service, 2011). American Indians are situated within a colonized history filled with genocide, assimilation and acculturation. Researchers contend that the history of colonization and continued marginalization, evident by inadequate education, disproportionate poverty and discrimination in health care services (Indian Health Service, 2011), are the source of American Indian health problems (Brave Heart, 1999, 2003; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

Conducting research with the American Indian population has proved challenging both due to historical atrocities and subsequent distrust bred through unethical research practices. Native people have been researched to death. Until recently, researchers conducting studies have not acknowledged (or known) the significance of American Indian history. Understanding Native people's encounter with historical atrocities bestows a deeper awareness for the context situating health and illness (J. F. Palacios & Portillo, 2009). Who knows the effects of living a colonized history? Those who live it.

A movement to bring forth traditional knowledge and practice, while reaffirming power over how a people are examined, has evoked a new orientation to researching wellness among indigenous people. The purpose of this article is to consider the usefulness of digital storytelling, positioned within a tradition of oral storytelling, as a research approach to enhance understanding and wellness in Native communities. Drawing upon current contributions of Native researchers, it will be suggested that incorporating an indigenous perspective to knowledge formation (oral traditional storytelling) with advances in technology (digital media and immediate dissemination) will help improve Native health. The information

is expected to be of value to both Native and non-Native investigators aiming to work with Native communities, and the Native communities hoping to partner with academic researchers.

DECOLONIZING RESEARCH

Historically, researchers have betrayed American Indian people. Whether it is the misuse of blood product among researchers, the detrimental report of sexually transmitted infections of a community that effects their economic viability, or the report of widespread virus that breeds fear among those surrounding the infected community (Davis & Reid, 1999), the power wielding hands behind research can make poor choices that have lasting damaging effects. A recent example of mistrust is when the Havasupais initiated a lawsuit against Arizona State University researchers for misusing blood samples taken from tribal members. In addition to brewing mistrust, American Indian communities resist research because partaking in the project consumes needed and non-existent resources (e.g. access to reliable transportation or gas), results are infrequently shared with the participating community, findings rarely improve local services in the community, benefits of the study seldom reach the community, and American Indians are tired of being guinea pigs (Burhansstipanov, Christopher, & Schumacher, 2005). Overall, the need for more appropriate research approaches with Native communities remains.

Even though measures have been taken to be culturally sensitive when conducting research with American Indian communities, there remains an unequal balance of power between the researched and the researcher. Recognizing the consistent exploitation of

indigenous communities made by colonization, marginalization and investigations, a movement was started to recapture the power lost to these bodies. Indigenous scholars have their "own way of doing things" that consists of their own set of knowledge (Dunbar, 2008). In her book Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith(Smith, 2001) explains how "new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person," (pg. 38), helping indigenous people make sense of their reality.

Our realities often involve living in multiple worlds. Linda T. Smith is careful to point out that decolonization is not about casting off our inherited Western theories and ways of knowing, but really is about recalibration. To pursue indigenous epistemology is to center *our* indigenous concerns and worldviews, and having our skills aid us in our pursuit from our perspectives for our own purposes. Naming research within her Maori community, Kaupapa Maori or Maori research was intentional for Linda T. Smith (2005). Employing their own term and language to name what was important to Maori, privileges Maori knowledge and ways of being. In Smith's view, echoed in her indigenous roots, importance is placed on the process (2001). Recovering stories of our (indigenous) past is linked to language revival and thus our (indigenous) epistemological foundations. Reframing research within a Maori conceptualization helps support social change and replacing power into the community's hands. Finally, Smith suggests that indigenous investigators working with their communities may be more sensitive to the needs of their community as they themselves rely upon the relationships fostered and must live with the consequences

and implications of the findings (2001).

While working with American Indian communities has been noted to be difficult given the previous stated reasons, successful projects are collaborative (Burhansstipanov et al., 2005; Davis & Reid, 1999) and include culturally patterned methods for engagement (Strickland, Squeoch, & Chrisman, 1999). Heeding the return to what we know and what our communities know will further provide successful collaborations by expanding upon culturally appropriate ways of pursuing research, but also honoring and supporting American Indian self-determination. Since the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975, American Indian people have had the right to determine their educational priorities for their communities, and often this has included storytelling (Inglebret, Jones, & Pavel, 2008). Storytelling, as an indigenous practice and philosophical orientation to the world, holds emancipatory potential for positively effecting change in our Native communities.

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

American Indian Worldview

To a degree, generalizing the vastly diverse American Indian cultures, of which there are 566 Federally recognized tribes (Indian Health Service, 2011), is engaging in a Western practice of reduction. While there are great differences even between two bands of the same tribe, there are also common worldviews held by American Indian people. By virtue of a shared colonized history, similarities among American Indian people have emerged far more vividly in contrast to differences. The use

of humor when faced with grief or hopelessness, or running on Indian Time are two examples as a source of common identity.

It is common for American Indian people to orient themselves as an extension of a broader collective such as their family, community, and creation/universe (Delgado, 1997; Lowe, 2002). Often greed and individual pursuits are shunned and ostracized as the supremacy and cohesiveness of the group is maintained (Lowe, 2002). Living life means having respect for the interconnectedness of all things- animate and inanimate (Buehler, 1992; Delgado, 1997; Lowe, 2002), and the orientation to life is meant to be holistic, interconnected, and relational (Buehler, 1992; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). Harmony is conceptualized as being in balance with the self, others, community, and surrounding world which also includes a spiritual sense (Lowe, 2002). Time is understood and practiced in a cyclical pattern that is ever changing and fluid, rather than stationary (Lowe, 2002). Seasons change only to cycle back. Birth, life and death occur cyclically (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). Much importance is placed on the present*ness*, rather than the future, for the future can be affected by what is done in the now. The journey is not a future destination; rather the emphasis is on the journey, in being and toward becoming (Lowe, 2002; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). This is not to say that Native people do not reflect on the past nor consider the future. One can look to findings by Native investigators to see that the generational pain from historical atrocities remain ever present in the community's mind and lived experiences of suicidal ideation (Strickland, Walsh, & Cooper, 2006), or that parenting actions of today and yesterday alike affect the wellbeing of future generations and thus steps are being

taken to help promote the future community's wellness (J. Palacios, 2012).

Values highly regarded by American Indian culture are those that respect endeavors to support their relational and interconnected worldview. Struthers (2005) shared a list of American Indian values that include: respect, generosity, wisdom, spirituality, stewardship of the earth, humility, honor, cooperation, identity, oneness, balance, harmony, and connectedness. As an example of connectedness and sense of duty and commitment to one's family, community and larger universe, the potlatch custom of giving gifts along Northern West Coastal American Indian communities was and continues to be conducted not only to redistribute wealth, but out of generosity. While committing to a sense of oneness, or connectedness among the community, attendees honor the traditions of old in a culturally appropriate way of caring for the collective through gift giving, feasting, singing and dancing (Easterson, 1992).

In contrast, the Euro-American worldview places an emphasis on the success of the individual. Family and community are important, but do not take center stage, as is common of the American Indian worldview. The self is viewed broken into parts: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual; whereas, the self is integrated and perceived as a unit of the whole in the American Indian view. While time is cyclic and fluid with a focus on the present*ness* in the American Indian world, time has a destination and future goals are set as time is lived forward within the Euro-American worldview. Additionally, differences can be found in how one views their relation to others and their environment. American Indian worldview holds the self and community in relation to the larger world/universe and the emphasis is to work along natural rhythms, versus holding one's self in stark contrast, sometimes in an oppositional stance against the world/universe, with the intent to tame or change the world to one's desires as in the Euro-American worldview (Delgado, 1997; Lowe, 2002).

American Indian Epistemology

Differences between each cultural worldview can be seen in orientation to research. Historically, for the biomedical sciences the pursuit has been focused on the absolute truth through objectivity. Indigenous scholars, similar to postmodern/post-structural scientists, view the world as one, which is filled with multiple truths and ways for understanding. Rather than focusing on the outcome, importance is placed on the process. Methods of collecting knowledge tend to be linear in the Euro-American tradition of research. For communities who are culturally oriented to a circular view of time and being in an interconnected way, applying Western methods may prove challenging and unnatural. Success for the researchers, in conducting research in Native communities, most likely can be found in selecting those methods that are flexible and can be shaped into cultural patterns aligned with the American Indian worldview (Dodgson & Struthers, 2005; Strickland et al., 1999).

Storytelling as a Tradition and Method

All cultures possess stories. Stories help us articulate understanding. The world cannot be understood without telling a story, for we make sense of lives and realities through lived experiences that are organized in story format (Inglebret et al., 2008; Wyatt & Hauenstein, 2008). Beyond artistic expression and enter-

tainment, stories are often our first teachers of the world. The value of stories as a pedagogical method is well recognized (Bergman, 1999; Haigh & Hardy, 2011; Inglebret et al., 2008; Iredale, Mundy, & Hilgart, 2011; Kirkpatrick, Ford, & Castelloe, 1997; Lee, 2011; Meyer & Bogdan, 2001), wherein cultural values, morals, laws, practices, and beliefs are taught and transmitted to future generations. Stories have the power to provide understanding, inspire empathy, and motivate problem solving. Indigenous scientist Felicia Hodge (Hodge, Pasqua, Marquez, & Geishirt-Cantrell, 2002) summarized the powerful function of stories:

> *Stories show ancient social orders and daily life, how families are organized, how political structures operate, how men hunt and fish, and how power is divided between men and women. They demonstrate appropriate behaviors; teach social rules and expectations, how to live harmoniously with others, being responsible and how to be worthy members. (p. 7)*

Stories move beyond folklore (Mabery, 1991), integrating science and art into knowing. As a part of AI oral traditions they exemplify relational ways of being and encompass time. As Struthers (2005) suggests: "Oral tradition naturally accommodates the essence of the past, the present and the future," (p. 1271). Stories are ever changing, like the flow of the river, but they do not forget where they have been and collected knowledge over generations is made accessible to present and future generations (Hodge et al., 2002; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). In addition to accessing our cultural practices, values and beliefs (Inglebret et al., 2008; Mabery, 1991; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005), stories provide a bridge connecting us to our ancestors and their

realities affirming group identity (Hodge et al., 2002; Inglebret et al., 2008; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005) and providing wisdom and experience that may help us identify solutions to community problems (Mabery, 1991; Meyer & Bogdan, 2001). For example, Maybery (1991) points out that motivation to identify solutions for healing his Diné community illnesses (e.g. substance use) can be found in Diné stories, for the story provides methods to understand and access the Diné worldview and philosophy.

Storyteller and listener are important components for the significance of the story. The interaction between the storyteller and listener is a shared experience (Carr, 1996; Hodge et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick et al., 1997; Werle, 2004), invoking inspiration, empathy and understanding. Often, stories change slightly from one telling to the next. The fluid malleability of stories, as they are reshaped and refitted, speaks to the power stories have in addressing community needs (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984). What is important one year may change the next given situated differences in the socio-political climate. Lessons learned from stories may not always be direct, especially in traditional American Indian storytelling. Usually, repeated telling of the storyline, despite modifications, herald different levels of understanding from the audience, reflecting different levels of readiness for the listener heeding messages (Inglebret et al., 2008; Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005).

Both as a tradition and research approach, storytelling displays a wide array of functions. As a tradition that facilitates cultural indoctrination, storytelling strengthens group cohesiveness through a unified identity and implicit adherence to a set of agreed upon practices

that are reinforced through story. As a research approach facilitating knowledge gathering, storytelling appeals to our relational mode of understanding while inspiring problem solving. Storytelling holds great potential for individual action, and greater potential for changing destructive community norms when individuals act collectively in harmony.

Storytelling as Emancipatory

The seamless ability to simultaneously impart knowledge, inspire, and generate problem solving capacity demonstrates the monumental influence story has in our lives. For the individual, storytelling centers their experience and knowledge at the forefront of importance. In the telling of a person's story, the study participant is viewed as a whole person; the story honors their humanness and personhood, the listener, if open, is left with an understanding of values and beliefs affecting the participant's decision making, and power imbalances are uncovered (Anderson, 1998; Kirkpatrick et al., 1997; Werle, 2004). For a brief moment, the listener walks in the shoes of the storyteller.

Investigators have found storytelling to privilege historically marginalized populations. Among women, storytelling respects their knowledge recognizing them as experts in their own experience, and grounds women's health care in women's lives (Banks-Wallace, 1999; Chinn & Kramer, 2008; Grassley & Nelms, 2009; Im & Meleis, 2001). Among African American women, the liberating cathartic effects of storytelling are found to be helpful in finding meaning in their own lives, bonding with others over storytelling, validating and affirming one another's experiences, allowing them to vent frustrations, resist oppression, and educate others (Banks-Wallace, 1998).

Indigenous scholars are charged with the task of sharing authentic indigenous narratives that illuminate the social, cultural, and political organizational patterns that reveal ontological and epistemological dilemmas (Dunbar, 2008). By drawing upon our traditional stories and storytelling orientation to understanding, Native and non-Native researchers may find paths to help us decolonize our lives and heal our communities (Hill, 2006; Lee, 2011; Meyer & Bogdan, 2001; Smith, 2001). Asserting our unique Native epistemological and ontological orientation to the world changes indigenous scholarly practice which in effect transforms how indigenous scholars think (Dunbar, 2008). Such action moves us to 'telling stories in the field as opposed to telling Van Maanen's (1990) stories of the field,"(Dunbar, 2008). In our relational sense of being and understanding, we are moving the ways of knowing and what is known to the forefront, thus honoring and respecting our indigenous worldviews and philosophies.

Both the liberating potential and traditional use of storytelling, as a research technique, intervention, and a source of community knowledge, intersect through stories as people make sense of themselves and their world. Additionally, through storytelling, parallel life experiences are shared among community members which creates a common experience and reference point of understanding (Inglebret et al., 2008), that supports the community's sense of cohesiveness and contributes to change.

STORYTELLING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Digital storytelling holds promise for helping communities and individuals change while employing traditional ways of knowing.

Traditional Storytelling in the Digital Era

In our current era, we can access information rapidly and digitally. There are multiple definitions for digital storytelling. Digital storytelling and indigenous digital storytelling have been used as documentaries (Iseke & Moore, 2011). For the purpose of this article, digital storytelling will be defined as a short 3 to 5 minute visual narrative replete with still images, video, text, and audio recordings that shares a compelling story (Gubrium, 2009), which is often based upon a lived experience-although not always. Although there is no data yet on how many people use digital media, we know from an online survey of K-12 teachers (N=500) that 91% use some form of digital media, in place of DVDs or TVs, on a regular basis for instructional use (Public Broadcasting Service LearningMedia, 2012). This signifies the power and importance digital media has gained. Some recognize digital storytelling as a form of participatory visual research, cousins to picturevoice, or photovoice (Lorenz & Kolb, 2009), and it has increasingly been used for social justice (Blue Bird Jernigan, Salvatore, Styne, & Winkleby, 2011; Toussaint, Villagrana, Mora-Torres, de Leon, & Haughey, 2011). Short video quips that evoke an emotional response hold potential for inspiring change. The therapeutic value in sharing stories with an audience has been noted through various health-focused studies. Digital storytelling has been used by patients to educate other patients (Iredale et al., 2011) and health care providers (Anderson, 1998; Banks-Wallace, 1999; Christiansen, 2011; Hunter, 2008; Kirkpatrick et al., 1997; Schwartz & Abbott, 2007) about the illness experience, to demonstrate the humanness behind a disease (Kirkpatrick et al., 1997), and to inspire individual (Chin, 2004; Sandars & Murray, 2009) and institutional changes (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2011; Stacey & Hardy, 2011).

Digital storytelling has some limitations. For youth who used digital storytelling to share feelings and personal stories of illness online, there was concern for online safety, the audience's reaction to the story, and the potential for the storyteller experiencing embarrassment about their story being shared (Yu, Taverner, & Madden, 2011). There appears to be potential for misunderstanding of the participant's intended message when sharing their completed digital work, and backlash from the audience regarding the content and/or message. Knowledge that the digital footage will be shared with a wide audience may impact the participant's storyline and images. Additionally, the community may raise concerns of the digital content,

Despite these concerns, digital storytelling has consistently been shown to spark introspection, raise awareness, and evoke change. But these changes are largely reflective of the dominant socio-cultural Western world, facilitating change among individuals but not communities. How can digital storytelling foster change among those who have been historically colonized and continually marginalized?

Digital Storytelling as Emancipatory

Like its mother, traditional oral storytelling, digital storytelling can foster liberation from the dominant socio-cultural world that continues to marginalize the marginalized. By creating the digital story, the storyteller has control over what is important to tell. African American youth have used digital storytelling in school as a literacy method to showcase their experiences in producing stories that reflected their home speech communities and values (Hall, 2011). In this example, youth found digital storytelling to re-center their

racial and gendered selves, allowing placement of their story in the forefront of knowledge and experience, pushing the discursive classroom boundaries to establish their own space of meaning and experience.

As a collaborative project, digital storytelling can inspire change among multiple layers connected to the story. Skouge and Rao (2010) found that for small rural diverse Pacific island communities, digital storytelling was transformative for the subject of the story, those who work on digital production, and the audience. In their digital story of a young wheel chair bound college woman's limited access to her dorm and campus, it was noted that all involved working on the digital story were affected through the process of creating the digital story, and that problem solving was facilitated (Skouge & Rao, 2010). These experiences with digital storytelling demonstrates that the process of creating the digital story can incite change among involved for the good of the story subject. Likewise, a collaborative research project with a rural California tribe used digital storytelling to identify problems to healthy food security (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2011). After showing digital stories to demonstrate the lack of low cost healthy food options to the community and key stakeholders, institutional changes were introduced (e.g. expanded fresh produce options at the market, installing electronic benefit transfer machines at the local farmer's market, and introducing food choices targeting people with diabetes), which promoted changes in individual shopping habits. In this study, changing community norms and raising awareness were viewed as viable options for supporting improved individual health behaviors.

Currently, there are ongoing American

Indian centered digital storytelling efforts on both local and national levels. Locally, the woman-owned, indigenous-focused consulting and digital storytelling company nDigiDreams LLC (www.ndigidreams.com/about.html) has collaborated with tribes, tribal colleges, state universities, non-profits, national organizations, small rural communities and individuals to focus on health, education, policy and cultural preservation (nDigiDreams, 2012a, 2012b). Northern Arizona University (http://nativedigitalstorytelling.blogspot.com/) has pursued an interdisciplinary and intergenerational project pairing elders with youth to created digital memories of how their culture is tied to the land in their project entitled, "Intergenerational Native Digital Storytelling Project," (Piner, 2011). The National Library of Medicine has sponsored "Native Voices: Native People's Concepts of Health and Illness" (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/) which is a myriad of short digital clips, images, interactive pages, and text to explore the interconnectedness of wellness, illness, and cultural life for those indigenous people living in the United States (U. S. National Library of Medicine, 2012) Funding opportunities for these programs are largely private grant based resources focusing on cultural preservation, though as digital storytelling gains popularity, it is conceivable that funding opportunities will broaden.

The very nature of digital storytelling, telling a story though use of digital media, lends itself to provoking deep reflection, which may lead to a transformative action. Research has found that reflection and action have been elicited from not just the audience, but those who work on the story production in addition to the subject of the story (Skouge & Rao, 2010). Digital storytelling, like oral traditional

storytelling, is transformative and has a place in the future for generating change not just on a community level, but also on a global level.

Digital Storytelling's Usefulness for Research with Native Populations

While the format benefits from our advancing technology and the audience grows wider (even global), digital storytelling is rooted within our enduring storytelling tradition. Most of the research on digital storytelling has demonstrated its ability to honor the individual's story; however, recent work on food security within an American Indian community has illustrated how the community's voice can be heard (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2011). While modifying the community as a whole was posited by the study as likely to facilitate individual behavior changes (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2011), recognition of the community's influence in individual health behavior changes both demonstrates the keen understanding of American Indian culture, but also the flexibility digital storytelling encompasses. More than one truth is attainable. In the above example, the community's truth and experience were sought. Both the multiple truths possible, dependent upon the digital storyteller's point of view, and the ability to give voice, parallel American Indian values of respecting one's voice (and not speaking for someone) and the possibility for multiple true views.

Digital storytelling provides ample space for both individual and communal voice. For both the individual and community, digital storytelling allows the story to unfold in such a way that the audience is drawn into the story. The story-maker, using their lived experience to demonstrate a point or share a meaning,

calls upon a shared understanding to demonstrate their point to their audience. The audience in turn has the potential to connect with the story. This delicate dance between the storyteller and the listener demonstrates how digital storytelling draws upon a relational and interconnected sense of understanding and being, reflective of the American Indian philosophical worldview. However, there is potential that the audience, grounded in their own cultural context, may not understand the message, or the importance of the varied layers of understanding within the story. Iseke and Moore's (2011) collaborative work on indigenous digital storytelling with First Nation Canadian communities has yielded practical insight into the challenges related to editing the community's voice (by way of editing the digital story), to fit a finite time limit, and to pare down the story so that it is more universally understood. Competing concerns on behalf of the community, investigators, and mainstream funding agencies, can be tricky to negotiate and careful consideration must be taken to ensure success.

Digital storytelling, like the American Indian orientation to time, is process oriented. Researchers have pointed out that the creative process behind digital production is just as or more important than the empathy and understanding culled from the audience reveal (Skouge & Rao, 2010). Moving through the world with the cultural/philosophical view that one is being, always on a path to becoming, mirrors the deep reflective journey one takes in creating the digital story. One must have a compelling meaning or story to share and one must engage in self-editing as images, music and words are carefully chosen to represent a specific idea. The digital storytelling production journey is also a journey of being and becom-

ing, of understanding and changing.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Storytelling in the digital era incorporates some aspects of traditional oral storytelling, including an oral narration. Rather than relying upon the images conjured from one's imagination, the storyteller directs the audience's attention to those images and sounds selected, thereby narrowing the field of relation. One's attention is held captive by the audio and visual content at hand. Digital storytelling is challenged by the time and cost taken to produce a story that can be retold in the same manner, rather than an ever-changing oral story that can be immediately changed according to the audience's needs. Although the digital story is malleable, depending upon the resources, it is more fixed in time compared to oral stories. It is unclear if this more static aspect of digital storytelling affects the potential for teaching and inspiring change. However, the degree of accessing a digital story far exceeds that of oral stories in light of immediate forums for posting digital media (e.g. YouTube) and the various programs in process of helping individuals and communities create stories (e.g. nDigiDreams,(nDigiDreams, 2012a) Native Voices,(U. S. National Library of Medicine, 2012) and Intergenerational Native Digital Storytelling Project (Piner, 2011). Although the audience is limited to those who have access to online forums, as people join the online community there is a sense of a globalized online community. Whether or not this community is cohesive has yet to be demonstrated. However, as Iseke and Moore (2011) warn, wider access to indigenous digital stories and the Euro-American cultural milieu surrounding digital storytelling, places pressure upon Native storytellers to conform a non-Native story structure

(e.g. telling a story with a more direct message) that changes the uniqueness found in Native storytelling.

There is a potential for great abuse in telling a story. There are significant concerns regarding the content of the story, authenticity, whose voice is privileged, and who it will be shared with. Digital media has the power to capture what words may fail to express and actions that are incredible. For example, the voice of the storyteller who chooses to showcase illicit adolescent substance use in a small community may provoke a strong negative reaction from the community who risks a damaging reputation and public consequences for a community wrought with problems. The issues of whose voice prevails in the story, and how the story is told and unfolds will need to be addressed. It is uncertain if this vital dialogue will take place and how it will be enforced. Today as in yesterday, there are unspoken, but known "community copyright" materials. Certain songs or stories (often from divine origin) are bequeathed to individuals and families who then entrust their gift to trusted family members. While it is unlikely that tribes or families who "own-the-right-to-share" a song or story in public settings will legally pursue copyright infringement, awareness must be raised among those who are unaware of this generally unspoken rule, so that the community and families are respected. As technology moves the role of storyteller upon anyone who has the means to craft a digital story, the ability to vet stories that are represented as true may diminish. The sheer volume of stories, the way it is crafted, and the inability to access resources to document authenticity are potential obstacles preventing corroboration. Finally, some stories are not meant for the wider public, but are held in trust for sacred ceremonies or special

gatherings, this is an issue of trespassing across sacred cultural knowledge. Often this is to protect the audience who may not understand the implications and power behind the words or songs, and it is a breach of faith, trust and respect for these stories and songs to be used outside of their prescribed time and setting.

The process of digital storytelling mirrors the American Indian worldview of being and becoming. As Skouge and Rao (2010) have found, the process of digital storytelling is just as important as the outcome, for people change through the very process of creating the product. This process, similar to oral storytelling, echoes the relational, interconnected American Indian worldview. Connections to people and environment are made through the process of piecing together the story. One sees the photo images, one can see the digital footage, one can hear the careful worlds selected for the story's narrator, and one can integrate all of this information into their understanding, making connections to the images, spoken words and message.

Digital storytelling advances the health sciences for Native and non-Native researchers and Native communities seeking to link with academic partners by identifying a culturally congruent method and intervention that may prove successful in improving some American Indian health needs. In addition, digital storytelling provides a route, rooted in traditional oral storytelling that legitimizes an American Indian epistemological and ontological view of the world. Iseke and Moore (2011) point out that telling the community's story helps in, "negotiating social priorities and contemporary needs, expresses community viewpoints, and safeguards community values and norms," all the while facilitating communal understand

of their political issues, affirming connection to their First Nation culture and legitimizing their indigenous knowledge (p. 21).

Both ethical and methodological considerations remain. The focus of this article is on the use of digital storytelling as a research approach and intervention for improving American Indian health concerns. The American Indian community may show concern in the digital story's content, as the reoccurring exploitive history is fresh in their communal consciousness. Reactions from the surrounding non-Native communities are likewise a concern emanating from the American Indian community. It is unclear what the ramifications are for Native communities, but history has shown that research has the potential for exploitation. Investigators must continue to practice sensitively, and understand that negative aspects (e.g. substance use) of the community may surface in the story. Investigators, both Native and non-Native, may find their work halted or indefinitely postponed, and their collaborative research relationships in jeopardy in these situations. In an effort to nurture the community partnerships, it will be essential that investigators facilitate a conversation with their partnering community on these more challenging prospective detrimental aspects, and provisions may be made in the researcher's community collaborative agreement. Community oversight is warranted when editing digital stories, for the community must live with the consequences. Further research is needed to determine the impact of digital storytelling on improving American Indian health and wellbeing. As a research approach that is culturally aligned to Native oral traditions, digital storytelling holds potential for great success. There is the issue of which health concerns are better suited for digital storytelling.

Finally, using digital storytelling as a research approach for collecting data will require additional logistical and scientific contemplation. It is unclear if some health concerns are better suited for digital storytelling than others. Little has been voiced in the health care literature as to the process of creating a digital story among individuals, groups and communities. Additionally, the costs versus benefits and methods for evaluation have likewise not very well addressed.

CONCLUSION

The health of our indigenous American Indian communities is out of balance. We must look to our cultural heritage and ancestors for ways to help heal the disharmony within our communities. Drawing upon the knowledge stored in our oral traditions and understanding the storytelling method is critical to secure our community's wellness. With rapid technological advancement, digital storytelling offers a complementary method for us to make our own. Our traditional storytelling methods can be adapted to the digital era. Through digital storytelling we can give privilege to our knowledge and experiences. Uploading our insight onto online forums can help educate the larger world of our health needs and strengths, but can also facilitate growing awareness within our community through the process of creating the digital story. Drawing upon our indigenous heritage, in this postmodern/critical theory era, the time is ripe for us to pick from our indigenous epistemologies the tools from which to foster wellness and healing among our communities. Lying dormant in the cupboard, waiting for the right season, right night, right situation, right time, is one of our most treasured tools- storytelling. The time is now, the present, in our being and as we are becom-

ing, to gather our stories and learn ways to enhance wellness within our communities. Let us encourage our communities, while poking around in the cupboard, to pick up that old cell phone, the video camera and grandma's photo album and get to work on their digital story.

References

Anderson, G. (1998). Storytelling: a holistic foundation for genetic nursing. *Holistic Nursing Practice, 12*(3), 64-76.

Banks-Wallace, J. (1998). Emancipatory potential of storytelling in a group. *Image - the Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 30*(1), 17-21.

Banks-Wallace, J. (1999). Story telling as a tool for providing holistic care to women. *MCN; American Journal of Maternal Child Nursing, 24*(1), 20-24.

Bergman, P. (1999). Storytelling as a teaching tool. *Clinical Excellence for Nurse Practitioners, 3*(3), 154-157.

Blue Bird Jernigan, V., Salvatore, A. L., Styne, D. M., & Winkleby, M. (2011). Addressing food insecurity in a Native American reservation using community-based participatory research. *Health Education Research*.

Brave Heart, M. Y. (1999). Gender differences in the historical trauma response among the Lakota. *Journal of Health and Social Policy, 10*(4), 1-21.

Brave Heart, M. Y. (2003). The historical trauma response among natives and its relationship with substance abuse: a Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 35*(1), 7-13.

Brave Heart, M. Y., & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). The American Indian Holocaust: healing historical unresolved grief. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, 8*(2), 56-78.

Buehler, J. A. (1992). Traditional Crow Indian health beliefs and practices. Toward a grounded theory. *Journal of Holistic Nursing, 10*(1), 18-33.

Burhansstipanov, L., Christopher, S., & Schumacher, S. A. (2005). Lessons learned from community-based participatory research in Indian country. *Cancer Control, 12 Suppl 2*, 70-76.

Carr, G. (1996). Geri Keams: "Coyote and Spider Woman and Other Creation Stories". 2011, from http://arsedge.kennedy-center.org/cuesheet/theater.html

Chin, N. P. (2004). Teaching critical reflection through narrative storytelling. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*(Summer), 57-63.

Chinn, P. L., & Kramer, M. K. (2008). *Integrated Theory and Knowledge Development in Nursing* (8th ed.). St. Louis: Mosby.

Christiansen, A. (2011). Storytelling and professional learning: a phenomenographic study of students' experience of patient digital stories in nurse education. *Nurse Education Today, 31*(3), 289-293.

Davis, S. M., & Reid, R. (1999). Practicing participatory research in American Indian communities. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 69*(4 Suppl), 755S-759S.

Delgado, V. (1997). *An interview study of Native American philosophical foundations in education.* Unpublished Dissertation, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

Dodgson, J. E., & Struthers, R. (2005). Indigenous women's voices: marginalization and health. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 16*(4), 339-346.

Dunbar, C. (2008). Critical race theory and indigenous methodologies. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (pp. 85-99). Los Angeles: Sage.

Easterson, M. (1992). *Potlatch, the Southern Tutchone way: A text on Southern Tuchone potlatch systems.* Burwash Landing Yukon Territory: Kluane First Nation.

Erdoes, R., & Ortiz, A. (1984). *American Indians myths and legends*. New York: Pantheon.

Grassley, J. S., & Nelms, T. P. (2009). Tales of resistance and other emancipatory functions of storytelling. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 65*(11), 2447-2453.

Gubrium, A. (2009). Digital storytelling: an emergent method for health promotion research and practice. *Health Promotion Practice, 10*(2), 186-191.

Haigh, C., & Hardy, P. (2011). Tell me a story--a conceptual exploration of storytelling in healthcare education. *Nurse Education Today, 31*(4), 408-411.

Hall, T. (2011). Designing from their own social worlds: The digital story of three African American young women. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 10*(1), 7-20.

Hill, D. L. (2006). Sense of belonging as connectedness, American Indian worldview, and mental health. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 20*(5), 210-216.

Hodge, F. S., Pasqua, A., Marquez, C. A., & Geishirt-Cantrell, B. (2002). Utilizing traditional storytelling to promote wellness in American Indian communities. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 13*(1), 6-11.

Hunter, L. A. (2008). Stories as integrated patterns of knowing in nursing education. *Int J Nurs Educ Scholarsh, 5,* Article 38.

Im, E. O., & Meleis, A. I. (2001). An international imperative for gender-sensitive theories in women's health. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33*(4), 309-314.

Indian Health Service. (2011, January 2011). IHS fact sheets: Indian health disparities. Retrieved February 12, 2012, from www.ihs.gov/PublicAffairs/IHSBrochure/Disparities.asp

Inglebret, E., Jones, C., & Pavel, D. M. C. (2008). Integrating American Indian/Alaska Native culture into shared storybook intervention. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 39*(1), 521-527.

Iredale, R., Mundy, L., & Hilgart, J. (2011). An online resource of digital stories about cancer genetics: qualitative study of patient preferences and information needs. *J Med Internet Res, 13*(3), e78.

Iseke, J., & Moore, S. (2011). Community-based Indigenous digital storytelling with elders and youth. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 35*(4), 19-38.

Kirkpatrick, M. K., Ford, S., & Castelloe, B. P. (1997). Storytelling. An approach to client-centered care. *Nurse Educator, 22*(2), 38-40.

Lee, L. L. (2011). *Decolonizing the Navajo Nation: The lessons of the Naabaahii.* Paper presented at the 42nd Annual National Indian Education Association Convention & Tradeshow.

Lorenz, L. S., & Kolb, B. (2009). Involving the public through participatory visual research methods. *Health Expect, 12*(3), 262-274.

Lowe, J. (2002). Cherokee self-reliance. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 13*(4), 287-295.

Mabery, M. V. (1991). *Right after sundown: Teaching stories of the Navajos.* Tsaile: Navajo Community College Press.

Meyer, J., & Bogdan, G. (2001, February 12-17). *Our "First Education".* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of the African American Studies, the National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, the National Association of Native American Studies, and the International Association of the Asian Studies, Houston, TX.

nDigiDreams, L. (2012a). About (Publication. Retrieved July 10, 2012: www.ndigidreams.com/about.html

nDigiDreams, L. (2012b). Collaborators: Planting nDigiSeeds Across Indian Country (Publication. Retrieved July 10, 2012: www.ndigidreams.com/collaborators.html

Palacios, J. (2012). Mothering all: Native women's experiences of mothering. *Journal of*

Advanced Nursing, In review.

Palacios, J. F., & Portillo, C. J. (2009). Understanding Native women's health: historical legacies. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 20*(1), 15-27.

Piner, J. (2011). A Basket Full of Stories: Intergenerational Digital Storytelling Project (Publication. Retrieved July 10, 2012: native-digitalstorytelling.blogspot.com

Public Broadcasting Service LearningMedia. (2012). National PBS Survey Finds Teachers Want More Access to Classroom Tech (Publication. Retrieved July 10, 2012: http://www.pbs.org/about/news/archive/2012/teacher-survey-fetc/

Sandars, J., & Murray, C. (2009). Digital storytelling for reflection in undergraduate medical education: a pilot study. *Education for Primary Care, 20*(6), 441-444.

Schwartz, M., & Abbott, A. (2007). Storytelling: a clinical application for undergraduate nursing students. *Nurse Educ Pract, 7*(3), 181-186.

Skouge, J. R., & Rao, K. (2010). Digital storytelling in teacher education: Creating transformations through narrative. *Educational Perspectives, 42*(1), 54-60.

Smith, L. T. (2001). *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1st ed.). London: Zed Books.

Smith, L. T. (2005). Kaupapa Maori research. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 225-247). Vancouver: UBC Press.

Stacey, G., & Hardy, P. (2011). Challenging the shock of reality through digital storytelling. *Nurse Educ Pract, 11*(2), 159-164.

Strickland, C. J., Squeoch, M. D., & Chrisman, N. J. (1999). Health promotion in cervical cancer prevention among the Yakama Indian women of the Wa'Shat Longhouse. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 10*(3), 190-196.

Strickland, C. J., Walsh, E., & Cooper, M. (2006). Healing fractured families: parents' and elders' perspectives on the impact of colonization and youth suicide prevention in a pacific northwest American Indian tribe. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 17*(1), 5-12.

Struthers, R., & Peden-McAlpine, C. (2005). Phenomenological research among Canadian and United States indigenous populations: oral tradition and quintessence of time. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1264-1276.

Toussaint, D. W., Villagrana, M., Mora-Torres, H., de Leon, M., & Haughey, M. H. (2011). Personal stories: voices of latino youth health advocates in a diabetes prevention initiative. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships, 5*(3), 313-316.

U. S. National Library of Medicine. (2012). Native Voices: Native People's Concepts of Health and Illness.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario: State University of New York.

Werle, G. D. (2004). The lived experience of violence: using storytelling as a teaching tool with middle school students. *Journal of*

School Nursing, 20(2), 81-87.

Wyatt, T. H., & Hauenstein, E. (2008). Enhancing children's health through digital story. *Computers Informatics Nursing, 26*(3), 142-148; quiz 149-150.

Yu, J., Taverner, N., & Madden, K. (2011). Young people's views on sharing health-related stories on the Internet. *Health Soc Care Community, 19*(3), 326-334.

About the Author

Janelle Palacios (Salish/Kootenai), RN, CNM, PhD grew up on the Flathead Reservation in Northwestern Montana. She is currently both an American Indian Research Fellow at the University of Arizona under the guidance of Dr. Teshia Solomon, and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California Los Angeles School of Nursing working with Drs. Adey Nyamathi and Felicia Hodge. While being mentored by Dr. June Strickland, Janelle received her Bachelor in the Science of Nursing at the University of Washington, and later moved to the University of California at San Francisco obtaining her Doctorate and becoming a Certified Nurse Midwife while being advised by Dr. Holly Kennedy. Her dissertation centered on the early childbearing (adolescent pregnancy) experiences of adult American Indian women. Currently she is completing a collaborative project on the young fatherhood experiences of American Indian men. Janelle strives to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing into research interventions aimed at enhancing wellness among American Indian families.

Cite this article as:

Palacios, J. (2012). "Traditional Storytelling in the Digital Era." Fourth World Journal. Autumn. Vol 11 Num 2. pp. 41-56.