STORYTELLING IN HEALTH AND PREVENTION

Susie Markus, MS, PhD, LPC
SETTING THE TONE
FOR
Our time together

Relax
Sharing our stories in safe spaces
IN OUR TIME TOGETHER TODAY

- Health disparities
- Intergenerational grief, trauma & health
- Connectedness
- Cultural roots of storytelling
- Theoretical roots of storytelling
- Types of storytelling & wisdom of storytellers
- Ripples of hope from one to many
- Nuts and bolts
HEALTH DISPARITIES and INTERGENERATIONAL GRIEF AND TRAUMA
“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

Maya Angelou
HEALTH INEQUITIES

• Health and illness follow a social gradient.
  • The lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.
    • It does not have to be this way.
    • It is not right that it should be like this.
    • Systematic differences in health are avoidable by reasonable action
  • Putting right these huge and remediable differences is a matter of social justice.

• Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.

(CSHD, 2008)
HEALTH DISPARITIES ARE:

• Differences in burden of disease, injury, & violence.

• Differences in opportunities for optimal health.

• Experienced by socially disadvantaged people.

• Directly related to unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and environmental resources.

  • Historical

  • Preventable

(Healthy People 2020)
HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Collective emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide.

A constellation of features in reaction to massive group trauma. It is observed among Lakota and other Native populations, including Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants, Japanese American internment camp survivors and descendants.

HISTORICAL TRAUMA EFFECTS

Unsettled emotional trauma, unresolved grief, depression, high mortality rates, high rates of substance use disorders, significant problems of child abuse and domestic violence

Boarding school experiences created devastating effects on American Indian families today, as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse were inflicted upon and learned by American Indian children in these schools. Spiritually and emotionally, the children were bereft of culturally integrated behaviors that led to positive self-esteem, a sense of belonging to family and community, and a solid American Indian identity. When these children became adults, they were ill-prepared for raising their own children in a traditional American Indian context.

Brave Heart & Debruyn, 1998, pp. 63-64)
Even family members who have not directly experienced the original trauma can feel the effects of the event generations later.

"Trauma is transmitted over generations to join an overarching legacy of assaults."

(Eliot, 2012)
TWO MOUNTAINS
TWO PHOTOS
DISPARITIES PERSIST

Suicide
Substance Use Disorders
Chronic Disease
Depression
Poverty
Anxiety
Shorter Life Span
Violence
Sexual Assault
RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS: CONNECTEDNESS BRINGS HOPE
DISCONNECTEDNESS IS RISKY

- Poverty
- Racism
- Historical Oppression
- Barriers to knowledge & care & resources
- Silence
- Isolation
- Feeling Different at School
- Depression
- Parents & adults don’t communicate & monitor
- Shame & Blame
- Peers value risk behavior
- Substance use

(Chen, Thomson, & Morrison-Beedy, 2010)
CONNECTEDNESS IS PROTECTIVE

Equitable & Respectful Environments
Connected community with access to care & education & resources
One caring adult
People discuss values & relationships
Peers have similar values
Knowledge of risks & access to prevention & care
Self-Efficacy

(Chen, Thomson, & Morrison-Beedy, 2010)
ROOTS of STORYTELLING
“Hold those things that tell your history and protect them. During slavery, who was able to read or write or keep anything? The ability to have somebody to tell your story to is so important. It says: ‘I was here. I may be sold tomorrow. But you know I was here.’”

-Maya Angelou
AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRADITIONS WERE A WAY TO:

• **Connect** to heal and nurture one another in a shared tumultuous history;

• Preserve unique spiritual culture in midst of agony;

• Commit to memory sights, sounds, smells of homeland;

• Survive by **sharing** information across plantations, learning about new environment, and perfecting language skills;

• **Weave** African cultural and spiritual traditions into new life to create African American culture.

(Banks-Wallace, 2002)
AMERICAN INDIAN TRADITION OF STORYTELLING

• A way to repair losses and share lost cultural knowledge

• In Navajo culture:

  “stories are told to teach children how to live well, which means understanding the Navajo worldview, which in turn means understanding one's purpose in life” (Eder, 2007, p. 279).

• Indigenous stories also serve to retell, in American Indian people’s voices and perspectives, “the settler version of history” (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T’lakwadzi, 2009, p. 137-138).
CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Roots in legal scholarship

Challenged structural racism, Anglo-American ethnocentrism and universally accepted truths, or stock narratives, upon which legal systems (and other systems) are built

Since oppression is so ingrained in systems, it is almost invisible and does not seem like oppression to those with privilege

CRT cultivates and shares counter narratives of people who have been oppressed

Counter narratives can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY OF PAULO FRIERE

• Brazilian Educator
• Pedagogy of the Oppressed 1968
• Worked with oppressed people in equalized relationships
• A multicultural social justice approach, found to be most effective today
• Relationships across lines of privilege and power
• With and on behalf
• Empowered people to examine their environments and transform their own lives
PANEL
FOCUS GROUPS
PHOTOVOICE
STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

STORYTELLERS AND THEIR WISDOM:
BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE AND INVESTING IN PEOPLE
STORYTELLERS ON DISPLAY

• Marginalized people on display to share stories with dominant culture
• Structural inequalities can undermine
• Alone to represent a whole population
• Can be painful, isolating and burdensome
• Power differential allows people from dominant culture the privilege of not believing the stories, and reacting with guilt, denial, anger or being sorry

(Srivastava & Francis, 2006)
PANEL

• Panel of young adults
• Emergent theme:

One Steadfast Adult
FOCUS GROUPS

• Gatekeeper connections statewide – **power of rural**

• People to be served as **direction setters**

• Focus group questions **prepared** to include voice of population served in work
  - We want to be involved
  - We want our parents to talk to us about values and relationships
  - We would like our parents to be educated about how to have “the talk”
  - When we don’t know something, we learn it from TV, internet, other media
  - When we don’t know something, we make it up
  - Just because we want the information and resources doesn’t mean we’re doing it

• **Onward** – Tell it to me Straight, Can We Talk?, Photovoice with Moms & Daughters, Cookie Dough Giveaway for Research
• Bell’s (2009) CRT approach to storytelling for social justice addresses issues of burdening marginalized individuals

• Storytelling communities of dominant and non-dominant groups

• Build relationships and collaborate to transform master narratives of dominant culture by reviewing popular stories in movies, books, and other art

• Non-threatening focus on stories, not people

• Explores master narratives and, through a cohesive group community process, develops emergent/transformative counter narratives.

• Resistance and power issues are mitigated in this approach by creating a sense of community around the task of creating counter narratives.

• Examines and retells historical narratives to arrive at emergent/transformative narratives that create healing and hope.
Bell’s Storytelling for Social Justice Group Process

- Progression of narratives explored are:
  - **Stock Narratives:** Uncontested due to systemic & structural racism;
  - **Concealed Narratives** or counter narratives of marginalized groups that tend to be unrecognized in dominant society due to ethnocentrism and structural racism;
  - **Stories of Resistance:** highlight the men and women (beyond the often-tokenized hero in dominant culture, Martin Luther King, Jr.) who are heroic in their courage to counter the stock narratives;
  - **Emergent/Transformative Narratives** that promote healing toward a more inclusive and socially just society for all.

- Example: Urban Cowboy
PHOTOVOICE

• **Vision:** for a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own story.

• **Mission:** to promote the ethical use of photography for positive social change, through delivering innovative participatory photography projects. By working in *partnership* with organizations, communities, and individuals worldwide, we will build the skills and capacity of underrepresented or at risk communities, creating new tools of self-advocacy and communication.

• PhotoVoice Charity Website, 2018
• http://www.photovoice.org/about/info/vision-and-mission
WHAT IS PHOTOVOICE?

Participatory Action Research – WITH, not ON
  Photography
  Storytelling
  Research
  Social Activism

An Uncovering of Silent Themes
  Empowering
  Connective Group Process – Storytellers and Community
  Inspirational
  Safe
  Stories are nonthreatening

Education
  Increases Awareness
  Uncover Silent Themes
  Address social determinants of health
  in all layers of ecological model
PHOTOVOICE PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR...

meanings  lives  cultures  perspectives
New beginnings are possible
When the light goes on
And we are ready…
This was the first thing I got when I stopped using...
Ripples of Hope: Trust the Process and Invest In Relationships with Humility
Through the Layers

• **Healing** for Individuals
• Universality **in Relationships**
• Strength and Courage **Unfold**

• **Sharing** Individual Story is Supported
• Collective Story Emerges and Brings Healing and **Connectedness**
• Sharing Story with Audiences Inspires and Builds More Connectedness
• Investing in Equalized Relationships is Healing for All
• Investing in Equalized Relationships Brings Unexpected, Sometimes **Magical**, Results
• Sharing Stories with Leaders and Policy Makers is Powerful
SHADOWS & LIGHT PHOTOVOICE:

MAKING YOUR EXHIBIT INTERACTIVE

Reception Invitation

Interactive Activity

© Kent Becker, Susie Markus & Angela Garfield
SHADOWS & LIGHT PHOTOVOICE

Stereotypes

Reframes

© Kent Becker, Susie Markus & Angela Garfield
PHOTOVOICE PARTICIPANTS BECOME …

Photographers
Storytellers
Researchers
Team Members
Teachers
Leaders
Social Activists
Stronger Each Day

She is a strong young woman with a lot of love for her son. Even though she might regret leaving school and not being able to do things for herself, it doesn’t matter - -

Because this bond will never end.
A Power Higher than you!
Healthy Relationships will remain stronger when you have a solid spiritual base.
Two people working together toward a positive direction.

I see the Creator all around us!
The key to recovery from historical trauma lies in restoring a community's "original instructions" and returning to cultural roots.

~Native American mental health leader Elicia Goodsoldier

(Eliot, 2012)
“We see ourselves as survivors instead of victims. We are restoring our original instructions and the methods of living that we followed one hundred years ago. We remain true to ourselves.”

(ELIOT, 2012)
SUGGESTIONS

- **Cadre** of collective storytellers
- Practice
- Trained/educated through **group process**
- Only what they want to share
- Discuss **boundaries** ahead of time
- Consent Forms – Photographer and Others in Photos
- **Equalized** Relationships
- **Invested time** creates lasting meaning
- Invested time creates lasting empowerment
- No quick fix to centuries-old inequities
- Cultural **humility**
Contact
Susie Markus
susiemarkus8@gmail.com
smarkus@wyhc.org
smarkus@wyointerfaith.org
307-274-6292
References


