

TALES OF HEALING: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DIGITAL  
STORYTELLING WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Based on a narrative analysis of data collected on behalf of the Trauma Healing Project in Eugene, Oregon this project considers the responses of 50 digital storytelling workshop participants (26 storytellers and 24 assistants), collected as audio recordings of closing circles, written evaluations, and post-workshop interviews. The data are organized by themes and then ranked according to frequency. For both the storytellers and assistants, the personal experience of participating in a digital storytelling workshop is overwhelmingly positive, with transformative insights being the most common experience. According to their responses, both storytellers and assistants experience increased feelings of self-efficacy, personal growth, and self-confidence directly after completing a digital storytelling workshop.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

*This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.*

—bell hooks, “Marginality as Site of Resistance.” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*

Walking in multiple worlds has been a very sharp collage, featuring at times dramatically different kinds of people and worldviews where the conversations are markedly different. In the digital storytelling work I have come to embrace with a passion, *everyone* I work with has struggled. In the workshops I’ve facilitated the struggles were sometimes with abusive parents or the consequence of a disability that requires some assistance, but all have been challenged, controlled, or ignored in some way. My struggles have felt minimal in comparison. I grew up in a home with laughter and I was never afraid. My kids and I have always had a roof over our heads, even if the bills have at times gone unpaid. No, I have never had a family member shoot themselves

in front of me or been raped after seeking a ride on a cold, rainy stretch of country highway.

But the people I have been working with have these stories to tell, and many, many others as well. And they tell them to us. They tell them with a voracity that shocks both them and the listener. Some stories bring laughter, but more often they are accompanied by grief and mourning. At times, everyone realizes simultaneously that holding those stories in is far more painful than telling them because inside they fester and extinguish. We are a social species and telling stories is what we do. Holding them back, or not shouting them out when they occur, is far more dangerous and inhumane than holding them in but we live in a society that still condones silence—encourages it—particularly when it involves corporeal events in some way. My experience with digital storytelling, especially when working with youth, has shown me, in a visceral way, that our priorities as a nation, and a capitalism on the brink, are eating away at those who have wandered from the path or do not otherwise conform to its exceptionally rigid parameters. And these borders are subtle. Quiet in the way it forces individuals into roles they are unable to control and, I suppose, this lack of control is what damages us in ways we are only beginning to recognize. Control is one of the fundamental ways in which digital storytelling is such a powerful tool for personal efficacy: the storyteller has complete control over what is said, how it is said, and who hears it. This simple act is a reclamation of personal power. During one workshop, I witnessed the transformation of a 16-year old who sat hunched over holding herself tightly and could not utter a word, (and, in fact, used text in her digital story rather than recording her voice) into a young woman who sat proud, open body, and had begun to speak out loud. I believed then and I

still do today that giving voice to those who have been forced into silence is a path to an individual, as well as a social, healing. How does one define healing? Better still, by whose standard does one measure it? This form of guided self-advocacy allows individuals to move out into the world with a new voice, a bolder, clearer picture of the world, and their place in it.

As a response to the realization of its potential for encouraging genuine democracy, or perhaps as my natural academic evolution, my involvement in digital storytelling had unknowingly begun years before, while working on my master's degree, while combining collaborative ethnographic and participatory media methods. It was here I came to understand the need for first-person narratives in a sea of academic writing that had placed more value on the third-person voice and an "expert's" analysis of another's experience than it did on the words and feelings from the individuals themselves. This led me to create collaborative life histories with women considered living on the margins of mainstream society by scholars and the media. I became aware of the work that Paulo Freire had been promoting since the 1940s in Latin America, as well as the framework of the *testimonio*, where the first-person narrative is intimately tied to a need for urgent political action. At that time, I was beginning to draw connections between the genocide in Latin America that had given birth to the need for the *testimonio* and the crisis of rape and sexual violence in this country. I saw that silence—both real and symbolic—was what aided and abetted the violence and genocide in both situations. The voice and first-person narratives became the focus of everything I do. The framework for the *testimonio*<sup>1</sup> uses first-person storytelling to expose abuses and support

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<sup>1</sup> Please see in Chapter III "*The Testimonio as a Framework for Resistance*" for a detailed discussion of this framework.

truth claims and has been quite effective when helping rape and other trauma survivors. I began applying this same framework to the genre of film, replacing transcribed oral narrative with a camera, a replacement where I saw these stories come to life in a way the written word very seldom does. Pauses and moments of silence are no longer dots or parenthesized descriptions on a page, but are instead a flood of emotion washing over a face that can never truly be described in words but can be felt by a viewer in what Kaja Silverman calls a “new mnemonic matrix.”<sup>2</sup> This matrix, as Silverman sees it, is where we might live another’s experiences, weaving them through our own personal memories and eventually know them in our own emotional bodies. This experience allows for a profound empathy, which could subsequently lead an individual to action. Filmed first-person narrative seemed the perfect vehicle for facilitating others in speaking their story and inspiring action on a social scale.

This nexus of transformed personal experience leading to social transformation is the crossroads of where I stand as a scholar and activist. Although I have been engaged with an organization that focuses on the individual experience using an holistic therapeutic practice, and digital storytelling is first and foremost the practice of personal subjectivity in the realm of multimedia storytelling, I want to be clear that my involvement is a political one. This study does not—and cannot—address the future political possibilities of what new-found personal efficacy might lead to, but this is where I perceive an empowered voice leading. I am not a therapist. I cannot address the psychological scholarship that deals with trauma or memory, but I can see strong connections in silenced voices and a lack of civic engagement. It stands to reason that an

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<sup>2</sup> Kaja Silverman, 1996. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. “Mnemonic” is based on “Mneme,” the Muse of Memory, one of the original three Muses.

individual who has not been listened to for a better part of their life (and worse still not believed when they have told someone of their experience) would be hard pressed to engage in a social process that has ignored them. Inspired by the organization *Megafonen* in Sweden, where a digital storytelling participant formed a media watchdog group that reports and rallies on immigration rights in Sweden after completing a workshop, I believe that practices like digital storytelling empower the individual engaged in them through giving voice and deep listening. It is why I began my journey volunteering at the Trauma Healing Project and is the foundation upon which I build my study.

My first exposure to digital storytelling (hereafter referred to as DST) came in 2009 through the organization the Trauma Healing Project (THP), located in Eugene, OR, where I had been volunteering as a research member and photographer, working with Latino youth in a participatory research project named *Knock the Trauma off La Rama*. We were guiding these teens in research methods that looked at bullying in their schools. They all successfully passed the CITI training and were certified.

It was at this time I was asked to participate in a digital storytelling workshop being led by someone affiliated with THP. I gladly agreed. Thus began my journey of learning about the process and slowly becoming a trained facilitator and leader of workshops. I have created two stories myself, and have also taught over a hundred students, in seven academic quarters, at the University of Oregon how to create digital stories.

The Trauma Healing Project hosts workshops with individuals who are survivors of violence and homelessness, immigrant Latino youth who are the children of survivors



of political violence or are survivors themselves, youth in the corrections system for crimes related to drug and alcohol abuse, and adults with disabilities. In all the groups thus far, the positive impact of telling ones story in the “Story Circle,”<sup>3</sup> with a circle of witnesses, appears to be profound. According to one youth in recovery, the ability to tell one’s story in a creative multimedia format freed him of the limitations that face-to-face conversations with a counselor or therapist entail.<sup>4</sup> The power of the first-person narrative to shape interpretations of life experience has led to the formal use of narrative as a therapeutic device, a process by which an individual “in interaction with a trained therapist relates [her] ‘presenting problem’ as a narrative, and then works with the therapist to analyze and reframe it in order to arrive at an affirming understanding of self,” (Davis 2004, 2-3). Although out of the scope of this particular study, the therapeutic potential of this process should not be underestimated, but its effects are obvious to even the first-time volunteer.

This research presents the personal experience of 50 storytellers and adult volunteers, recorded at the end of six workshops conducted by the Trauma Healing Project, located in Eugene, Oregon.<sup>5</sup> The participants are aged from 11 to 70 (20 male and 30 female). My inquiry analyzes personal narratives after completing a digital story and relies on narrative analysis of evaluation data, collected by the Trauma Healing Project as audio recordings of group circles, post-workshop interviews with individuals, and written evaluation forms filled out after completing a digital storytelling workshop.

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<sup>3</sup> Considered an ancient tradition by the Center for Digital Storytelling, the “circle” is viewed as the heart of the process in the creation of a digital story (Lambert 2006).

<sup>4</sup> According to one participant, aged 15, making a digital story about his neglect and drug abuse allowed him to say things he had never been able to say in treatment because “I didn’t have to say it to someone’s face...I didn’t feel judged and could use pictures and music” (anonymous, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Please see Chapter IV for a more detailed discussion of the organizations and the workshops themselves.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed and the written evaluations have no recognizable markers to connect responses to the individuals who filled them out. The workshops are based on the model created by the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California in 1993 and occurred between December 2010 and October 2012. Each organization represents an individual workshop conducted by the Trauma Healing Project, with the exception of one that was a combined group of individuals from Full Access and Oregon Supported Living Program. Two different workshops were held on the John Serbu Youth Campus where the Phoenix Program is located (first one: December 2010 and the second: March 2012). The organizations involved in this project are:

1. **The Phoenix Program**, located at the Department of Youth Services and part of the Juvenile Justice system on the John Serbu Campus in Eugene, Oregon, in operation since March 2005.
2. **Looking Glass Youth and Family Services**, the largest private, nonprofit provider of services for troubled youth in Lane County, Oregon, in operation since 1970.
3. **Full Access** is one of multiple brokerages for adults with developmental disabilities throughout the state of Oregon and opened in March of 2002.
4. **Oregon Supported Living Program**, founded in 1978, is a semi-independent living program, which provides various support services for individuals with mild disabilities who maintained their own residences in Eugene. In 1987, OSLP expanded to serve persons with more complex disabilities.

Research Questions 1 and 3 are specifically concerned with the feelings of the participants themselves (see below). My second Research Question interprets those feelings through a lens of “self-efficacy,” a notion introduced by Bandura in 1977 in his seminal article “Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change.” According to the article, and applied gently to the workshop experience, *mastery*, or “expectations of personal mastery affect both initiation and persistence of coping behavior” (193) and that, moreover, “not only can perceived self-efficacy have directive influence on choice of activities and settings, but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated” (ibid.). Although this study looks at perceptions directly after having completed a digital story, I look for phrases and words that communicate a changed relationship to experiences and people. Whether these feelings are sustained is the root of future research and will not be answered in this study, as I do not have the data to support an analysis. My hope is that this study will contribute to the small but growing scholarship on digital storytelling by locating common themes and presenting individual voices of both storytellers and assistants. It begins to fill a gap where a lack of digital storytelling scholarship features the actual voices and experiences of those who engage in a digital storytelling workshop by analyzing post-workshop interviews, audio recordings of closing circle comments on the last day of a workshop, and written evaluations filled out by both storytellers and assistants. I do this in the hopes of better understanding how the digital storytelling process affects an individual immediately after completing a digital story.

These questions guide the inquiry:

### ***Research Questions***

RQ#1: *What is the personal experience for an individual who engages in a DST workshop?*

RQ#2: *Does creating a digital story lead to increased feelings of self-efficacy?*

RQ#3: *What is the personal experience for those who assist/volunteer at a digital storytelling workshop?*

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEXT FOR STUDY

It could be said that sharing personal histories has long been a human endeavor. We have gathered and used these first-person narratives as a way of understanding more deeply particular historical events, and, more recently, as a new form of historical writing that includes the voices of the marginalized in society. Oral history, like all disciplines, has undergone an evolution in breaking down the long-held assumptions about itself, its methodologies, and its intentions. Digital storytelling (DST) is a current expression of this historical process, made globally available through digital tools and the Internet. Although often small-scale, “it can be seen as a prism” (Lundby 2008, 363) through which we might glean the significant social consequences of new media. Many view DST as a way to change the way we engage in our communities, inspiring and promoting democratized media practices and civic involvement (e.g. Couldry 2006; Dahlgren 2006; Meadows 2008). Similar to the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, where groups who perceived themselves as locked out of historical dialogue,<sup>6</sup> the digital media environment has altered the age-old art of storytelling and oral history sharing and collection into a potentially democratized history writing process.

In 1993, the founders of the Center for Digital Storytelling, located in the Bay area of California developed a unique workshop environment that guides people through a creative, autobiographical writing process and assists them in using family photos, home video, and other images to produce short, first-person multimedia projects called

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<sup>6</sup> See The Lesbian Herstory Archives as an early example of marginalized rewriting of history. <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/>.

“digital stories.” As a “facilitation of ‘everyday’ stories, digital storytelling emerged from the community-activist theatre backgrounds of its founders,” (McWilliam 2009, 150); the process emphasizes fundamental elements of good story making combined with a demystification of digital media technology and tools. These tools allow communities to record their own stories for future generations, many stories that would have otherwise been lost or gone unheard. The construction of a digital story has rough parameters (although these can be altered depending on the situation): “250 words, a dozen or so pictures, and roughly two minutes in length. As with poetry these constraints define the form (e.g. a haiku is a poem written using 17 syllables, and the 14 lines of a sonnet are written in iambic pentameter) and it is the observation of that form which gives it an elegance” (Meadows 2009)<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted, however, that there is no universally agreed upon definition of the genre, “much less a consensus on what constitutes a successful digital storytelling project” (Hayes and Matusov 2005, 1). The Center for Digital Storytelling has grown to become the leader in a “vast global media field,”<sup>8</sup> which has brought this process to 40 countries around the world and 46 states in the U.S. In mid-2012, CDS founded *Storylab*, with the aim to “radically improve public conversation in the U.S. and around the world [with] a new online media bank called The Republic of Stories,”<sup>9</sup> where anyone will be able to access thousands of stories from their archives.

Through another lens, we might view digital storytelling by recognizing that digital media have become a social space where power might be negotiated by exposing a

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<sup>7</sup> Lecturer in Participatory Media & Photography, Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies and former Creative Director of BBC Wales Digital Storytelling.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/digitalstorytelling.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.storycenter.org/about-storylab/> Last Accessed November 27, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

direct link between politics, media production, and the crisis of political legitimacy in a global perspective. Development of interactive, horizontal networks of communication has encouraged the rise of a new practice in communication, “mass self-communication,” which is a form of socialized communication that potentially reaches a global audience, is multimodal, and is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception. Under these conditions, insurgent politics and social movements are able to intervene more effectively in this new space. This is referred to as “counter-power” (Castells 2007), which is the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge institutionalized power relations, “for the purpose of claiming representation for their own values and interests” (Castells 2012, 5). Corporate media and mainstream politics have also invested in this new communication space and, as a result, mass media and horizontal communication networks are converging. The net outcome of this evolution is a historical shift of the public sphere from the physical realm to the new communication space—a “MediaSpace” that both “creates its own space and, as a media form, is influenced by the spatial frames within which it operates” (Lundby 2009, 178 quoting Couldry and McCarthy 2004, 2). “The great strength of networked politics praised by Castells...is that it allows disparate groups of activists to amass a presence at key sites of traditional political power that gets them recognized, if not yet warmly greeted, as political actors” (Couldry 2010, 146). It also suggests, simply, that “the balance of power between filmmaker and audience is changing” (Chapman 2009, 3).

As an emergent arm of this new space, DST is defined as the “whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources,” (Lundby 2009) and is considered a bottom-up activity, a user-generated media practice

conducted by nonprofessionals, which has the potential for democratic social change. It is also seen as filling a gap “between everyday cultural practice and professional media that was never adequately bridged during the broadcast era” (Hartley 2009, 197). Hartley and McWilliam (2009) consider it an “elaborated textual system” (5) that challenges distinctions between professional and amateur production. DST is about crafting an agentive self.

Creating a space where the stories of those living in what the mainstream refer to as “the margins,” are given a rightful place in the pages (or websites as is often the case) of history is the ultimate goal of this project. History has mostly been written by the ruling classes for a very long time—it has been erased, changed, and forgotten as well. The Gutenberg press (1440) instigated a crack in the elite’s control of the means of production and made it possible for a person who could read and write to communicate information by circumnavigating the power structure. Of course, you needed to be able to read and write in order to do this, but it was an opening point. In some ways, we have reached another cracking point and have seen similar reactions to new media. As Innes<sup>10</sup> stated in 1950, societies seem to react in violent and radical ways when new technologies are introduced because they threaten and challenge the existing power structure. New media, the Internet, and tools that allow us to bypass the oligarchic control of media channels do just that. In fact, a potential for revolutionary democratic change can be located in the ability to put the means of production and distribution in the hands of the

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<sup>10</sup> *Paper and the Printing Press*, 1950. Harold A. Innis.



people. Do we live in a “post-Gutenberg”<sup>11</sup> epoch, as some have suggested? If this is the case, and if Innis was correct, is it any wonder that the six major media conglomerates<sup>12</sup> are scrambling to pass laws such as CISA (Cyber Intelligence Sharing & Protection Act), SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) or PIPA (PROTECT IP Act: Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act)?

Importantly, digital storytelling has taken hold in media-rich and digitally saturated countries such as the United States, Australia, Sweden, Japan, and Great Britain, although workshops are being conducted in locations such as Gaza and the West Bank<sup>13</sup>, South Africa<sup>14</sup>, and Guatemala,<sup>15</sup> to name but a few. DST has particularly been embraced by educators and others working with youth, many of whom are quite comfortable using digital technology. Perhaps the first large-scale youth project was DUSTY: “Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth,” a collection of after-school, evening, and summer programs that was a collaboration between the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Education and West Oakland's Prescott-Joseph Center for Community Enhancement aimed at closing the “digital divide” by providing access to new technologies and by promoting particular social practices around them, for example,

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<sup>11</sup> “The post-Gutenberg (pG) age is a shorthand phrase for the idea that text is no longer the exclusive medium for transmitting knowledge (Gutenberg being the inventor of printing).” <http://msteer.co.uk/edu/jmgutenb.html/> Last Accessed November 30, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=4923173>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.voicesbeyondwalls.org/>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.ijr.org.za/oral\\_hist.php](http://www.ijr.org.za/oral_hist.php)

<sup>15</sup> <http://gojoven.org/fellows-stories/>

“ways of thinking about stories, self, and community, and ways of interacting and participating. DUSTY is not an isolated phenomenon. In neighborhood centers, youth organizations, community theaters, and faith-based institutions around the country and across the world, youth are similarly envisioning, creating, rehearsing, performing, and revisioning, using language, media, their voices and bodies to represent themselves, their families and friends, their communities, their ideas, their takes on our world” (Hull 2003, 230).

DST takes the principles of participatory methods and the theoretical underpinnings of oral history and alternative standpoint epistemologies and combines them with digital tools. DST is made possible by the guidance of trained facilitators in a workshop environment and is at times combined with treatment programs, counseling, or as after-school programs. Digital tools offer potentially cheaper and easier formats for dissemination of local stories and community histories (Gubrium 2009; Lundby 2008; Nisi et al. 2009; Powell 2005; Sawhney 2009; Schäfer 2004; Soundararajen 2006; Wei & Kramarae 2008). With the advent of new media technology and digital tools, the process of oral history collection is altered, allowing individuals to tell their own stories in an environment in which they feel safe, as well as control who hears their story and when. Stories created in digital storytelling workshops, at least those produced in the workshops I have been affiliated with (and, for that matter, any created in CDS-inspired workshops) are done so for and by the individuals telling them. For example, a digital story created in a workshop would not be uploaded to a Youtube channel by the workshop facilitators without the express permission of the storyteller. Websites do exist—such as *Silence*

*Speaks*, which also works with trauma survivors<sup>16</sup>—that features stories for public viewing, but the decision to present them is that of the storyteller and not the organization.

For those engaged in the DST “movement,” there is a sense that we are making a difference in the lives of people by creating pathways for them to tell these stories and that it is one of the first genuine amalgamations of expert and user-led creativity (Hartley and McWilliam 2009). This collaborative environment is a tool for the promise of sweeping change as it levels the playing field in terms of which story is told and who does the telling. Some believe that all current forms of communication require multiple-citizenship and that “our navigation of the Internet is an interactive, rule-governed, ever-evolving experience” (Foley 2012, 19).

Although there exists an uneven diffusion of digital tools and competencies around the globe, in wealthy and digitally saturated countries, such as the U.S. and Scandinavia, there “are fields of intense digital storytelling activity” (Lundby 2009, 176), what he refers to as a “digital tsunami” (ibid). Unlike the U.S., Scandinavian countries have secured financial support through publically-funded educational institutions and “mixed-economy” institutions such as the Delta Garden (2006-2007), a CDS initiated project with a consortium of Swedish groups, including Swedish Television, the Forum on Continuing Education for Journalists in Kalmar, the Universities of Växjö, Blekinge, and Jönköping, and several locally based new media and community organizations. The resulting regional project, which represented the Center’s first co-branded effort in Europe, collected digital stories throughout Sweden and developed other methods to

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.silencespeaks.org/>

promote citizen media production.<sup>17</sup> Digital Storytelling has been incorporated into university classrooms throughout Sweden, as well as being used by real estate developers and social justice organizations, to name a few. Collaborations between academic institutions and activist groups are growing in the United States, as seen in the current digital storytelling project *From the Center*, a project that grew out of the collaboration between the Forensic AIDS Project (FAP), established in San Francisco in 1983 and the first HIV service provider in a California prison, and Jailed Women and HIV/AIDS Education: A Collaborative Investigation” (JWHE) also known as the RISE Project, a three year participatory action research (PAR) project in the San Francisco County Jail. *From the Center* is a feminist HIV/AIDS digital storytelling initiative for incarcerated women, led by feminists of color working in HIV/AIDS participatory education and research. “In 2006, FAP began implementing feminist participatory programming to address and center the needs of incarcerated women and HIV/AIDS. Realizing traditional and hierarchical teacher-student education was limiting, FAP focused on feminist collaborations with academics, FAP staff, and incarcerated women”<sup>18</sup>. According to their website, “we worked together to acquire partnerships with the Center for Digital Storytelling and other local advocates, as well as funding for implementation”<sup>19</sup>.

The Center for Digital Storytelling offers monthly public workshops in Berkeley, CA and Denver, CO between May and December. They also offer them twice a month

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.storycenter.org/cs\\_instcapbldg.html](http://www.storycenter.org/cs_instcapbldg.html)

<sup>18</sup> “It’s your story too:” reconsidering feminism, HIV/AIDS, and the digital divide” in *Fembot: Feminism, New Media, Science and Technology*.” January, 2013. <http://fembotcollective.org/blog/2013/01/11/its-your-story-too-reconsidering-feminism-hiv-aids-and-the-digital-divide/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://ourstorysf.org/our-process-2/>

during the spring and summer, and choose locations around the world to offer one or two a year. These training workshops do not focus specifically on certain populations as the ones in other countries do, but rather are open to anyone who can afford them, or have received a scholarship. CDS does, however, work in conjunction with organizations that pay for their workshops through grants the organizations themselves have written to bring them in. There is a CDS scholarship fund for their monthly public workshops, where spaces are given away free of charge (for example to women recently released from prison).<sup>20</sup>

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This project is grounded in two primary theoretical frameworks. One is an emergent theory surrounding digital storytelling and its connection to the increasingly mediated world we inhabit. The second draws from documentary studies, where there is a nascent discussion regarding DST as a new sub-genre of the documentary tradition. Both place value on self-representation and the visual element of DST, as well as on truth claims and attributes, and both seek a deeper understanding of an individual. They both share ties with the liberation, democracy, and social justice movements and might be seen as a new, self-generated form of autobiographical documentary tied to the tradition of films dealing with social justice and citizen advocacy.

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<sup>20</sup> Personal communication with D. Weinshenker, Rocky Mountain/Midwest Region Director, Center for Digital Storytelling - Denver

## *The Emerging Theories of Digital Storytelling*

Digital Storytelling (DST) is viewed not only as an emergent media form but also as a movement (Hartley and McWilliam 2008) and “bridges the subjective ‘me’ focus of contemporary culture and diffuse collective strands of society” (Hertzberg and Lundby 2009, 117). DST is considered a *mediated* process by some (Couldry 2000; Erstad & Wertsch; Martin-Barbero 1993; Silverstone 1999) and a *mediatized* one by others (Hjarvard 2004; Lundby 2008; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999; Schulz 2004), although the differences between the two terms are minimal and seem more geographical than truly conceptual. Mediatization (whose adherents tend to be located in Scandinavia and Northern Europe) is a way of describing the transformation of cultural or social processes into a form or format that makes it particularly appropriate for re-presentation and to focus attention on how communications media impact (*mediatize*) the political process. Hjarvard defines mediatization as “the process through which society increasingly is becoming dependent on the logic of the media...thus, social interaction within institutions (e.g. the family), between institutions (e.g. science and politics) and in society as a whole is performed by and through the media” (2007, 2-3). In general, the concept of mediatization tries to capture “long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other” (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2010, 223); we can identify it as being concerned with the systematic consequences of standardization.

Those who use the term “*mediation*” view DST as a “transformative process in which the meaningfulness and value of things are constructed...and is dialectical because

while it is perfectly possible to privilege those mass media as defining and perhaps even determining social meanings, such privileging would miss the continuous and often creative engagement that listeners and viewers have with the products of mass communication” (Silverstone 2002, 761-762). Couldry (and others in this camp who tend to be located in Britain) has written as his definition:

“...theories of mediatization, because they look for an essentially linear transformation from ‘pre-media’ (before the intervention of specific media) to ‘mediatized’ social states, may be less useful for grasping the dynamics of digital storytelling than other approaches which I identify with the uses of the term ‘mediation’...an approach [which] emphasizes the heterogeneity of the transformations to which media give rise across a complex and divided social space rather than a single ‘media logic’ that is transforming the whole of social space at once” (2008, 42).

Although not linked to the digital storytelling scholarship, the notion of *remediation* might be a useful connection. *Remediation*, where a sense of “immediacy” prevails, is a desire to “put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed” (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 10). It also blends the old and the new where we “adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality” (Deuze 2011, 66). DST does just this. The desire for immediacy leads digital media to borrow from each other as well as from their analog predecessors such as film, television, and photography (15). No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, nor does it work in isolation from social and economic forces. What is striking about new media comes from the particular

ways in which they “refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (ibid). DST does not seek a dissolution of the medium, as is described as part of remediation, but on some level it does seek to place the individual story in a position that certainly makes it immediately available. Moreover, its multimodal framework is a remediation of all the separate media involved: the written word, the spoken word, images, music.

I believe all these terms: mediatization, mediation, remediation are complimentary and their nuanced differences can—and should—be recognized as working simultaneously. Joe Lambert, one of the founders of the Center for Digital Storytelling, has written that all contemporary movements of change are a response to globalization, the bland uniformity of corporate monoculture, and a search for “something individuated” (2009). He believes that, as an antidote to this obsession on greed and accumulation, rather than simply changing channels or “surfing the machine made media,” (xv) we might listen to our own stories and the stories of our communities instead. Ultimately, whatever we call this process, it begins with a story, written and then spoken aloud in a circle. Digital tools simply allow us to turn it into a multi-layered experience and share it with others on a scale unheard of twenty years ago.

In the opinion of some, digital storytelling touches at the “heart of contemporary processes enabling new forms of knowledge production, social networking, and play...[and] raises new debates on civic participation and social inclusion, competence formation and identity work” (Lundby 2011, 364). According to those who conduct workshops and also write about them, “digital storytelling may challenge established patterns of authority based on various forms of institutional legitimacy [and] at the same



time, storytellers may have the means to develop new forms of authority” (ibid).

Moreover, Hull and Katz (2006) “believe that individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives” (47).

Multimodality, an essential aspect of the digital storytelling process, is defined by van Leeuwen (2005) as “the combination of different semiotic modes—for example language and music—in a communicative artifact or event” (281); it is what separates it from oral history or written narratives (Hertzberg-Kaare and Lundby 2009). Quoting Hull and Nelson (2005): “a multimodal text can create a different system of signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constitutive parts” (225). They also conjure Ong (1982) by invoking the concept of “secondary orality,” which is “participatory and communal” as an element of DST (127). Secondary orality, as a “post-literate” conception, bridges the fluidity and communal attributes found in pre-literate oral communication to the information preservation capabilities of print, thus potentially allowing for a development of global awareness. It also allows for instantaneous feedback in communication between people, facilitates the development of community, and allows for the preservation of information as texts while encouraging fluidity and communal ownership of information. Because of the time-and-distance-spanning capabilities of cyber and digital communications, secondary orality can build community and group-mindedness (from UseNets to listservs), but it also allows for subjectivity, empathy, situational focus, and closeness to the human life-world. Knowledge can be preserved (as in blogs), but it is also fluid (as in wikis). As the Internet and the Web allow people from around the world to communicate freely with

each other, users can potentially develop a global awareness. In these ways, secondary orality offers potentials that build on literacy but also reintroduces many of the features of primary orality<sup>21</sup> (Ong 1977, 1982). These elements create tensions that multimedia authors must contend with, but this tension also creates powerful meanings and experiences. According to Kress, we have made a broad move from a “centuries-long dominance of writing” (2003, 1) to a new dominance of the image. This “broad move” has also been referred to by others as a shift from the “textocentrism” (Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty 2006; Williams 1958) of Western society to more of a “polylogue (or polytaxis) that will lead to greater understanding than any single contribution can ever engender” (Foley 2012, 26). Although I would argue that the image has indeed taken a place of prominence, the story itself—whether transmitted orally, audio recorded, or written down—is the heart and soul of the digital storytelling experience.

Partiality is a significant aspect of the multimodal approach. It forces us to ask in what ways a specific mode of representation communicates a particular meaning. Although, in theory, all modes start out as equally significant (Jewitt and Kress 2003) and produce creativity in “unexpected, unpredictable ways” (Stein 2003, 134). These multiple partial modes change the potentials for representational and communicative action by their users and “the notion of interactivity which figures so prominently in discussions of new media” (Kress 2003, 5) also requires an “epistemological commitment” (ibid.). This epistemological commitment is something I will address in more detail later in this manuscript.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.innovateonline.info/extra/definition980.htm>

### ***Documentary Theory: Art as a Weapon***

Sanchez-Laws asks, in her article “Digital Storytelling as an Emerging Documentary Form” (2010), whether we can view digital storytelling as an emerging sub-genre of documentary film. I will use her question as a good starting point in situating the DST process within documentary theory. If we take the four foundational tendencies of documentary, as listed by Renov (1993), that appear in all documentary work at varying percentages of the whole: 1) to record, reveal, or preserve; 2) to persuade or promote; 3) to analyze or interrogate; 4) to express; as our basis for what qualifies as documentary, then digital storytelling most definitely fits the description. Briefly, DST reworks experience in order to record and preserve a personal story, often revealing pieces of a personal narrative never before spoken or heard. The results thus become a collection of localized public histories documented through the first-person subject. Persuasion is a subtle, underlying agenda in any first-person narrative, as it is presented as a truth claim, something intrinsic to all documentary forms. The entire process of digital storytelling could be said to be a personal interrogation or analysis of personal feelings and experiences, and quite often opens up space for deeper reflection and further action. The last of the tendencies is expression; this is the deepest impulse for most individuals engaged in the process: the desire to express a personal story about themselves, a place, or perhaps another person.

A strong sense of voice distinguishes first-person documentary films (Nichols 2010). Using the “primary models” for nonfiction film created by Nichols as the gauge for what constitutes a documentary, digital storytelling could be said as drawing from the *historical* model, the *testimonial* model, and the *autobiographical* model. A historical

documentary recounts stories that happened and offer an individual perspective on them. Testimonials are oral histories about personal experiences; and autobiographical documentaries are personal accounts of someone's experience and perceptions. Digital stories can all be classified as any and all of these categories. As Nichols has written, "the advent of digital cameras and recording devices, computer-based editing programs, and the internet have spawned a wave of documentary work that promises to alter many basic assumptions about the form" (159). As the evolving style of documentary has resulted in the "gradual fading of the artificial distinctions" (Barsam 1992, 376; see also Corner 1996) that have separated fiction from nonfiction, so too can we see a fading between old and new forms of documentary—through an ever-widening cultural landscape and across different platforms and formats. Could these blended and fading distinctions be viewed rather as a time of "postdocumentary," as some suggest (Austin and de Jong 2008)? Corner (2002) is a proponent for simply referring to something as a documentary project, and not a documentary at all (an adjective rather than a noun)—which is probably a more useful way of dealing with the ambiguity.

Like Sanchez-Laws, I believe more study into the connections between digital storytelling and documentary are needed. Clearly, as far as fundamental qualities go, DST can easily wear the mantle of a documentary project. We have entered an era of media convergence that makes the flow of content across multiple media channels and platforms almost inevitable (Jenkins 2003). This blending is reworking definitions, allowing for discussions that deal with ethics, power distribution, and helps raise questions about the role of a media producer as a community facilitator (Sanchez-Laws 2010). However, it seems to me that both first-person film and digital storytelling fight a

similar battle, where the veracity of both—due to the nature of memory and personal experience—are under constant scrutiny. This scrutiny and struggle for legitimacy is not so much a consequence of an aesthetic or technical discussion on what makes or breaks a documentary, but more, I believe, a conversation on traditional epistemological frameworks and those who uphold them.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will consider (traditionally) disparate scholarship that all express a desire for praxis-based and social-justice focused research, weaving together a global and interdisciplinary web of visual communication, liberation and participatory politics, standpoint epistemologies, and literary studies. My hope is that these connections inspire others to defy academic walls that separate us and create a confluence of action based on mutual goals and aspirations. This section will not only discuss the primary scholarship regarding digital storytelling, but will also highlight some of the core values that drive the global movement by connecting and situating my research within other—much larger scale—projects. My hope is to show how oral history, digital tools, and web 2.0 have coalesced into an expanding development that seeks to support marginalized individuals in self-expression and local emancipation. I begin this discussion with their point of convergence.

#### *Digital Storytelling: Listening and Seeing*

New media was once considered a rival of text, much in the same way that all new technologies, as they have entered our daily usage, cause a radical (and sometimes violent) reaction from those in power who do not wish to lose their position of dominance (Innes 1972) based on the familiar. This threat has rather quickly given way to this new way of communicating, whereby the individual might tell their own story, promote their

goods across the globe, or simply share a photo they love. “One billion people now have access to the Internet, the first global medium” (Mirzoeff 2009, 2), over 120 million videos have been uploaded to YouTube alone, and 3 billion images to Flickr.

Autobiographical film and video enjoy a prominence never before seen and individuals are collecting the stories of their local neighborhoods and organizations at rates unheard of. Renov (2004) uses the term “self-portraiture” (xiii) as a way of describing these self-generated representations of self and worries that this absorption in the self is a symptom of narcissism. For some, this is no doubt the case. A common fear is that “it can strengthen the narcissistic, nonreflective bent of our society and create generations of people immersed in fantasy who have little ability to transfer the digital experience that absorbs their energies and time to the mundane travails of life” (Friedlander 2009, 191). However, first-person narratives, and our desire to tell others our stories is as old as the human species and this unique, and potentially liberating, intersection between oral history, visual self-representation, and genuine social justice is as much a possibility as our darkest fears about human nature and the future trajectory of digital technology. Both are particular manifestations of the Web 2.0 landscape (Thumin 2009).

According to Karen Worcman, the founder and director of the virtual Museum of the Person, based in São Paulo, Brazil, “everybody writes history...and that history has a social function” (Visscher 2008, 80). The *Museu da Pessoa* is an virtual museum, an archive that chronicles, preserves, and disseminates the life histories of ordinary people using various media formats. The members of this international network believe that: 1) every life story has value and is part of social memory; 2) every person plays a role as an agent of social change; and 3) life stories lead to a better understanding between peoples

and cultures.<sup>22</sup> By creating a multimedia data bank of oral reports, videos, photographs, and personal documents, Worcman is making oral history accessible and usable to a broad section of the community. Oral history projects have become widely viewed as community organizing tools and useful for “building self-esteem and ethnic-pride by giving voices to people from disadvantaged or marginalized groups” (Ashoka Foundation 1999)<sup>23</sup>. According to the website, that while “conducting interviews that lasted as long as 15 hours, Worcman heard sundry stories of horror and loss, of courage and hope. But something else stuck with her. “Half-way through the research I had an insight,” she said. “I began to understand the power of history.”<sup>24</sup> Although oral history has a long for many years celebrated the role of individual narratives as new forms of historical evidence or testimony, it is not generally concerned directly with the “conditions that regulate the availability of voice for individuals” (Couldry 2010, 117). Although even within the field of folklore itself, where “folklorists often make audible the voices of those not otherwise heard or publicized beyond their own communities” (Radner 1993, viii), there has been reluctance to film life stories, relying instead on the tried and true format of transcribed oral narrative and photography to present life stories. Foley (2012) believes that traditional academia hasn’t “entirely failed to credit the existence of oral tradition [but have] done the next worst thing: banning all or most such works from the hallowed halls of literary studies, treating them like unworthy pariahs by lodging them ‘where they belong’ in buildings adjacent to the museum” (151).

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<sup>22</sup> Core Values as listed on the website: [http://www.museudapessoa.net/ingles/about\\_the\\_museum.htm](http://www.museudapessoa.net/ingles/about_the_museum.htm)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ashoka.org/about>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.brazilmax.com/news.cfm/tborigem/fe\\_society/id/24](http://www.brazilmax.com/news.cfm/tborigem/fe_society/id/24)



BBC Wales commissioned a large DST project known as *Capture Wales*<sup>25</sup> in 2001 (Figure 1). *Capture Wales* was the first large-scale project that taught individuals how to create short multimedia digital stories, in workshops following the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) model. These 384 stories are available on two websites: one is in English and one in Welsh<sup>26</sup>. A subsequent project *Telling Lives* was produced in 2005 that facilitated the stories of residents throughout the U.K.



Figure 1. Capture Wales Screen shot from BBC Wales

Participants have stated in interviews about the process that they felt as if they had “been heard” and “had a voice,” “suggesting that the process of taking part in the projects afforded them valuable recognition of their point of view and experience. It seems a short step to assume that the result of ‘having a voice’ might be some form of social

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<sup>25</sup> A joint project of BBC Wales’ New Media Department and Cardiff University’s Center for Journalism Studies, using the Center for Digital Storytelling’s model.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/arts/yourvideo/queries/capturewales.shtml>

change, or that ‘having a voice’ in itself constitutes pressure for social change” (Thumin 2009, 91). Although this may be a hefty assumption Thumin makes, treating voice as a *value* means discriminating against frameworks of social economic and political organizations that deny or undermine voice. Many other projects have been conducted since, and the Center for Digital Storytelling has worked with “nearly 1,000 organizations around the world and trained more than 15,000 people, in hundreds of workshops to share stories from their lives”<sup>27</sup>.

By listening to the stories of individuals within their communities and creating networks of citizens, scholars, activists, policymakers, and others interested in advocating for themselves and building coalitions within their communities only makes the potential for real effects more viable. For example, in Scandinavia, where it has been incorporated into numerous youth organizations, there are ongoing workshops and websites dedicated to the promotion of youth stories and youth empowerment, particularly with underprivileged and immigrant youth. According to Simon Strömberg, the director of *Unga Berätter/Youth Tell*, the youth digital storytelling program at the School of the Arts Stockholm, DST has moved from the periphery in Sweden into the center<sup>28</sup>.

“Digital stories can range along a continuum of social involvement, from the story authored mainly alone as an act of autobiography or self-expression, to a collective effort to portray community or assert a shared perspective. Those emphasizing digital storytelling as an act of autobiography tend to view the activity as being primarily of service to the individual telling the digital story, an act linked to long traditions of theory

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.storycenter.org/history.html>

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview, 2011.

and inquiry into the function of narrative in the construction of memory and identity. Those emphasizing the collective function understand digital storytelling as an act of group representation serving a political purpose for that group in being able to define who they are and to counter stories and impressions of them created by others, often others with greater power and resources” (Davis and Weinschenker 2012, 47).

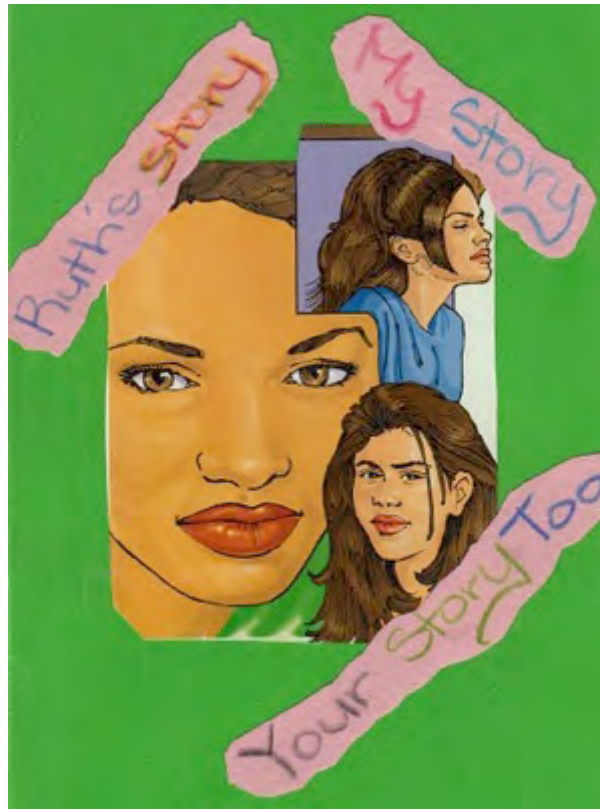


Figure 2. “Miracle,” *From the Center*

This quote is well-supported by the work being done in *From the Center* (Figure 2), which emphasizes how technology, creativity, and storytelling may facilitate empowerment and alternative pedagogical methods on HIV/AIDS prevention. In particular, *From the Center* focuses on “constructionist learning—learning

through creating” and their “project aims to provide digital media access and education for women inside and outside the jail setting as authors, directors, and storytellers of their own lives.” Individuals involved in From the Center “believe incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women are experts, educators, and storytellers on pressing social issues of HIV/AIDS, the prison industrial complex, and gender equality.”<sup>29</sup> DST is also being employed as a way of soothing ethnic tensions by creating a dialogue between communities, politicians, and local citizens. One such project is *Megafonen* (The Megaphone), a project started in an immigrant neighborhood in northwest Stockholm. This project was founded by a young man who had participated in a digital storytelling workshop and felt compelled to extend his feelings of empowerment to his community. Through peer-to-peer support, he guided youth in telling their experiences as immigrants to Sweden as well as life in their local neighborhoods. He also taught them how to organize and empower themselves. One of the many programs to grow out of the *Megafonen* work is known as Quick Response,<sup>30</sup> an editorial staff that investigates how the Swedish news media report on immigration, integration, and xenophobia and was chosen as one of Europe's top 30 best initiatives for elimination of discrimination and encouragement of diversity in media.<sup>31</sup>

Organizations wishing to better understand young people’s experience and insights are beginning to seek out youth narratives. It is seen as a way to “catch what is

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<sup>29</sup> “It’s your story too:” reconsidering feminism, HIV/AIDS, and the digital divide” in *Fembot: Feminism, New Media, Science and Technology*.” January, 2013. <http://fembotcollective.org/blog/2013/01/11/its-your-story-too-reconsidering-feminism-hiv-aids-and-the-digital-divide/> Last Accessed February 19, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.quickresponse.se/in-english/> Last Accessed November 21, 2012

<sup>31</sup> <http://quickresponse.se/in-english/>

happening here and now” (Hertzberg and Lundby 2009) in the lives of youth. The use of digital tools makes the process easy and enjoyable for most young people, something that is often a source of frustration for older participants who are not considered “digital natives” (Prensky 2001). Kotilainen and Rantala (2009) point out that it is often necessary for youth to engage with social or political participation as “actualizing citizens implementing lifestyle politics, communicating through digital media and joining loose networks” (660), whereas adults “act mainly as dutiful citizens by voting, following news as a source of political information, [and] joining social organizations (ibid.). Erstad and Wertsch (2008) refer to these as “new performance spaces,” especially for youth, who use online sites to express opinions, views, and comments using multimodal means that are uploaded with the intention of sharing aspects of themselves with others. DST workshops can harness the skills many youth already possess and educate them in how to navigate adult terrains such as laws governing copyrights, freeware programs, and political networking. “Mediatized stories are in this sense seen as a global phenomena of shared narratives” (33) where the rules of public engagement, very often thwarting youth involvement in community decisions, can be sidestepped. An element of this empowerment for young people comes in their (re) definition of the self where they can reveal their often hidden or repressed identities through multimedia expression. Being asked to write and record their stories in their own words and voice makes this an appealing process for youth (Hertzberg-Kaare and Lundby 2009).

The combination of digital storytelling with youth participants tends to branch into two primary trends. One analyzes and seeks to understand this process within a “critical discourse of democracy and citizenship, stressing that young people are entitled

to be heard and should be encouraged to have a voice in public spaces” (Nyboe and Drotner 2009, 173). This scholarship considers both digital and alternative publics, as well as “real-life” spaces (boyd 2007; Dahlgren 2000; 2005; Fraser 2000; Thumin 2009), and the sense of youth civic identity is becoming contingent and is “continually negotiated in relation to the media” (Kotilainen and Rantala 2009, 659), what they refer to as a “mediated civic connectedness” (664). The other trend situates this conversation within a discourse on knowledge societies and the development of future competence and education (Drotner 2007; Erstad 2005; Nyboe 2006). Digital storytelling is considered an avenue where these two branches may meet and nurture a young person’s capacity for civic engagement as well as catalyze their handling of the complexity of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century world (Nyboe and Drotner 2009). Civic competence does not derive exclusively from political engagement, it should be noted, but “emerges from the overall development of the *subject*” (italics mine, Dahlgren 2006, 273).

A caveat in this discussion lies in the actualization of gained insight. Many people consume media in isolation—even if presented with something radical—the challenge is connecting any impulse or changes accrued through the process into the wider world. The “viewing architecture maintains that viewers must keep this to themselves” (Juhasz 2008, 307), which can cause an unmooring from its context and community. This unmooring can be minimized through community screenings that have nets of community members and resources available to the viewers and participants so connections can be extended and deepened. Moreover, during the screening of the stories at the end of a workshop, the participants, volunteers, and invited guests view the final stories is very much tied to the concept of witnessing and sharing of stories.

Silverstone (2002), who recognizes a potential trap in all digital media, sees individuals as neither prisoners of dominant ideology nor victims of false consciousness, but rather “willing participants...in a mediated culture that fails to deliver its promises of communication and connection, with enduring, powerful and largely negative consequences for our status as human beings” (762). Lack of direct involvement in the process of digital storytelling, however, produces a limited perception and can suffer from a negativity that is often a direct result of “armchair introspection” (James quoted in Craighead and Nemeroff 2001, 194). As a direct challenge to this deterministic attitude, those who work directly in the process very rarely write from this perspective. With that caveat in mind, issues of power, authorship, and individual intention come into play in this process, especially for children and youth. For example, as in the story of “Steven” (Nelson, Hull and Roche-Smith 2008), power dynamics at play between the adults surrounding children or youth who have not yet fully developed a sense of identity or voice can appropriate the stories of those individuals. Steven, a 12-year old who took part in an after-school program on digital storytelling, was a novelty in this low-income community at the time. Steven very much had a story in mind that he wanted to tell, “a story about me, when I was a baby” (422), which he happily narrated to the undergraduate helpers and tutors who transcribed his words for him. This story was one of personal triumph against the odds—his mother had been addicted to drugs during his pregnancy and he was a “sickly” baby. He had become a straight-A student and was succeeding in school. His digital story was a positive one and shown throughout his town as an uplifting message, used to inspire other students in his community. Tensions erupted over Steven’s story when one of the workshop volunteers, also an African

American, took issue with what he perceived as a stereotypical depiction of African Americans and drug use, crime, and welfare abuse. The volunteer also had issues with the university tutor, a white woman, and swapped this tutor with an African American woman who shared the volunteer's feeling about stereotypes and "ghetto stories" (426). This changing of partners created conflict with the workshop facilitator who worked to create a safe environment for youth to tell whatever story they chose in whichever way they decided. It also revealed that Steven's authorial intent was undermined by all the adults around him—on all sides of the situation, including his mother—and these political power dynamics played out against him. His tutor insisted that he "make lemonade" out of the lemons he had been given in life, hence, the title of his story was "*LEMONADE!!*". His story made the rounds in the community, was shown numerous times but began to create a kind of false perception that his friends eventually teased him about and his grades began to drop; he eventually withdrew from his former lively and talkative self, and began socializing with a different group outside of school. In the authors' last interview with him, when he was seventeen, he was longing to turn eighteen and leave the "hell and drama" (427) that his life had become since making the digital story. This is referred to as being "ventriloquated" (Bakhtin (1981) quoted in Nelson, Hull and Roche-Smith 2008, 420), by processes beyond his control, "due to the fact that they [the youth] may have yet to have developed the ideological autonomy to fully speak for themselves" (ibid.). These dynamics can shape the self-presentation authored by youth and although, within the CDS framework there exists a "leave no fingerprint" ethos<sup>32</sup>, it is a possibility that assistant imprints on a story increases as participant age decreases.

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<sup>32</sup> From the Facilitator Intensive Training workshop, June 2011.



The story related above introduces what must be viewed as a contested terrain in the scholarship regarding the revisiting of traumatic experiences. Although I am in no way a scholar of psychotherapy or neuroscience, where many years of working with trauma survivors can be found, and with the very important caveat that and my involvement in digital storytelling is focused on combatting oppression and not delivering therapy, a brief foray into the scholarship regarding trauma treatments reveals new conceptions of healing available that directly contradict the traditional notion that most practitioners working with trauma survivors (particularly those suffering from PTSD) have based therapies upon. Broadly, Pennebaker and his colleagues found that repeated writing about one's thoughts and feelings concerning a very upsetting personal event has positive long-term effects on one's mood and health. Conversely, attempts to avoid thinking about one's trauma and to avoid reminders of trauma are associated with persistent PTSD symptoms (Pennebaker and Beall 1986). Most scholars in the fields of cognitive behavior and psychiatry (amongst others) believe that experiencing, expressing, and disclosing intense emotion in response to stressors is an adaptive, healthy mode of coping. According to this view, repression of emotional experience and expression is potentially damaging. However, widely accepted assumptions about emotional processing are coming under increasing critical empirical scrutiny (McNally, Richard, et al. 2003). According to some experimental studies, these scholars have reported data that either fail to support or contradict these previously held beliefs (e.g., Bonanno and Kaltman 1999; Stroebe, Stroebe, Schut, et al. 2002; Wortman and Silver, 1989). Social and cultural factors may also impede natural healing. "Certain norms and beliefs may lead survivors to think that they are irreversibly damaged by the trauma, thereby

increasing their risk for PTSD. For example, many Kosovar women who were raped during the recent Balkan conflict regarded other people's response to their trauma—namely, the belief that they were defiled by the experience—as the worst part of their rape trauma. Culturally based beliefs that worsen the implications of a trauma may complicate treatment” (McNally, Richard, et al. 2003, 74). A novel avenue of preventative treatment development was published that used the tile-matching puzzle video game “Tetris” as a “cognitive vaccine to inoculate against escalation of flashbacks contributing to full blown PTSD” (Holmes, James, Coode-Bate, et al. 2009, 5). This “cognitive visuospatial task” was used in experiments that were conducted 30 minutes post-exposure to traumatic stimuli and were effective in reducing flashbacks of that trauma as well as associated clinical symptomatology over one week. “Our alternative and novel approach of using cognitive visuospatial tasks, rather than pharmacological means to reduce flashbacks following trauma aims to deal directly with the consolidation and potentially, reconsolidation, of such intrusive imagery in an ethical, safe and economical way” (ibid.). Performing a visuospatial pattern-tapping task at the onset of trauma significantly reduced the frequency of later attacks of PTSD, whereas a verbal distraction task increased them (Holmes, Brewin, and Hennessy 2004). It is important to point out that in these studies that employed visuospatial reprogramming (by playing Tetris) have not been longitudinally tested and, as yet, have only be proven to work when conducted 30 minutes after the traumatic stimuli and they were tested for a week post-exposure. The study very clearly states that this visuospatial practice, at least now, has been proven to work in the short term and the authors have made clear that they intend to continue testing its effectiveness. Indeed, Tetris-like activity might well be incorporated

into crisis intervention and first-response teams.

More generally, in some tasks requiring knowledge that is hard to put into words, having participants verbalize information may interfere with their ability to use their perceptual memory of the event, an effect called *verbal overshadowing*. One explanation is that the verbal description leads to a new and only partially accurate memory that interferes with people's ability to access the original visual image, at least under some circumstances (Schooler and Engstler-Schooler 1990).

Imagining a previously experienced aversive event could maintain or enhance conditioned responses to the situation, almost as if the aversive event had reoccurred (Dadds, Bovbjerg, et al. 1997). Thus, if intrusive images are a feature of psychopathology, one can see how such imagery may provide a mechanism perpetuating responding to a variety of internal and external cues. "Images associated with earlier memories can reoccur in trigger situations, and their similarity to reality can then serve to activate dysfunctional behavior such as talking very quickly, or not leaving one's home" (Holmes and Mathews 2010, 355). In the same way that imagery can exacerbate "maladaptive" behavior, it can also be used to reduce it. For example, repeated images of calmly approaching a feared situation first reduces anxiety during imagery itself and subsequently positively increases behavior in the world at large. This may well reflect something that happens when a storyteller begins to revisualize a painful memory or event while in the phase of multimedia building. If the creation of images draws on information in autobiographical memory, then to the extent that the memories accessed include feelings experienced during prior episodes, the constructed image is likely to reinstate the same emotion. Indeed, Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) propose that

autobiographical memory for emotional events may be stored in a form resembling images, so that the newly reconstructed image would be likely to contain elements of these personally significant emotional image-memories. In this study, parallel effects emerged when positive events were imagined, with greater increases in positive emotion following imagery than for verbal processing of the same events. Thus images appear to act as ‘emotional amplifiers’ for both positive and negative information (Holmes and Mathews 2010). Parallel effects emerged when positive events were imagined, with greater increases in positive emotion following imagery than following verbal processing of the same events. Thus images appear to act as ‘emotional amplifiers’ for both positive and negative information.

In the opinion of some, digital storytelling touches at the “heart of contemporary processes enabling new forms of knowledge production, social networking, and play...[and] raises new debates on civic participation and social inclusion, competence formation and identity work” (Lundby 2011, 364). According to those who conduct workshops and also write about them, “digital storytelling may challenge established patterns of authority based on various forms of institutional legitimacy [and] at the same time, storytellers may have the means to develop new forms of authority” (ibid). Moreover, Hull and Katz (2006) “believe that individuals and groups can learn to fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives” (47). Madison (2005) believes it contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice, taking us beneath surface appearances and unsettles neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying operations of power and control. This is accomplished through contextualizing our own positionality, thereby

making it transparent and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation. Even within the practice of feminist oral history collection, projects suffered from similar authorial assumptions. The telling of a personal story can be an empowering one, validating the importance of an individual's experience, but a narrator's control over the story ends when a session is over. This shift in control can expose the possibility of appropriation hiding within or under a rationale of empowerment. Imbalances in power and privilege have historically encouraged transforming an experience into a text to be analyzed by someone other than the storyteller (Gluck and Patai 1991).

One of the greatest challenges to the digital storytelling process, particularly with folks living on the margins in the United States, is one of funding. Many of the workshops conducted in the U.S. are paid by the individuals themselves, which are expensive. The Standard workshop is \$495 and the Facilitator Intensive, \$900—no small fee. The workshops conducted by the Trauma Healing Project are paid for through grant dollars and are at times not available. Most city/county/state agencies that deal with folks on the margins who do not have the capital to purchase this opportunity rely on those organizations that spend a good amount of time writing grants. The regulations assume a scientific, largely biomedical, model of research. While the social sciences have always been included within the regulatory embrace, their inclusion has been disputed by critics among both policy makers and scholars since the 1960s. The lack of fit between the epistemologies of various social science disciplines and the terms of regulation has never been given due consideration. Psychology is the discipline that has most concerned regulators and with which they are most familiar; history – and the humanities in general

– have been a “foreign language.” As a result, IRB review of oral history is an awkward and at times contentious affair.<sup>33</sup>

Finding volunteers who are qualified to guide and teach in workshops is also a challenge, particularly in small organizations that struggle to obtain grant funding and rely on volunteers. Moreover, due to this lack of financial incentive, some volunteers are simply unreliable and leave to pursue wage-based projects. Dush (2009) discusses how challenging it can be for organizations that repeatedly lose their newly trained volunteers experiencing a steadily changing cadre of people as “a frustration, you know you train people but they leave...and you can’t expect that the person who got trained is going to be so proficient that they can pass on the skills easily. So the training/retraining, the technical issues of do we have the right computer, do we have the right software...” (Dush 2009, 262-263). In my experience, this is a reality and many volunteers, especially older volunteers, struggle with the technology. The heart may be there, but the technical skills often are not. I have also witnessed how this struggle is overcome and how it is often empowering for the storytellers as they can “teach the teachers.” This is particularly true for the youth who very often do not struggle with this aspect of the process at all. According to one participant, an adult with severe disabilities, who when asked what they were most proud of during the workshop answered “*showing XXX how to do a program with XXX’s computer today and I’m proud of it, then...(cries)...*” (from transcripts, see Appendix B). In my opinion, the organizational frustrations are outweighed by the participant experiences, which are consistently positive.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

## *Documentary Film and the First-Person Narrative*

Documentary film, video, and photography are the visual basis of digital storytelling. Although the written/oral aspect of the process is the foundation for a successful digital story, it is in fact only half of the practice. The visual aspect should not be underestimated or undervalued. In this section, I will follow a trajectory that began with the first documentary photographs, making special note of those efforts that have arisen along the way, which I consider important precursors to the digital storytelling movement. These include documentary photography and film connected to social justice movements and participatory media practices. It is also useful to look at revolutionary cinema from Latin America, inspired aesthetically by neo-realism from Italy and cinema vérité from France. Although this is by no means an exhaustive or even detailed history of visual practices tied to social justice, it does connect various strands across the globe that stand out as important first steps in the unfolding of the digital storytelling model.

Since the advent of the camera in 1814, when Joseph Nicéphore Niépce successfully created the first photograph with a *camera obscura*, individuals have been using the power of the image to reflect back to us the beauty and the horror of our everyday life. As the camera process became increasingly more stable and the equipment itself changed from large, bulky pieces to easy-to-carry cameras that fit in one's hand, a handful of photographers began documenting life around them. This led to the first powerful images of social inequality, marginalization, and the realities of industrial exploitation by photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine (Figure 3). "Riis and

Hine shocked their contemporaries with dramatic images showing the human consequences of unchecked urban growth and industrial excess.”<sup>34</sup>



<sup>35</sup> Figure 3. A little spinner in the Mollahan Mills

Their work from the late 1890s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century inspired many other photographers to document aspects of a community that tend to go unseen by those in positions of power, who historically have had little interest in social justice. Although photography focused on social issues continues to this day, the availability of film (and eventually video and its digital offspring) brought to life the people and their voices, allowing for self presentation and advocacy.

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<sup>34</sup> James Curtis, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/photos/modern.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis Hine, photographer. “A little spinner in the Mollahan Mills.” Dec. 3, 1908. Witness Sara R. Hine. Location: Newberry, South Carolina. *Library of Congress, Public Domain*.



According to Grierson, considered in many ways to be the first documentary filmmaker to take on social issues, “art is not a mirror but a hammer, it is a weapon in our hands to see and say what is good and right and beautiful.”<sup>36</sup> His film group known as the General Post Office Film Group, produced a film in 1935 known as *Housing Problems* (Figure 4), in which a novel method was employed: “instead of the commentator or narrator...slum-dwellers appeared as spokesmen [who] talk directly to the camera and provide a guided tour” (Barnouw 1993, 95). The bourgeoisie and elite were appalled by this film, unaccustomed to seeing “the other” represented in such startling clarity—and in their own voices.



Figure 4. *Housing Problems*, 1935, British Commercial Gas Association (BCGA)

Grierson’s films were designed to challenge and influence social and public policy directly (Sherman 1998) but according to Nichols, “rather than fostering the

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<sup>36</sup> Although the concept of hammering “what is good and right and beautiful” into (what we can assume is society) is a bit oxymoronic, his point is well-taken.  
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0003457>.

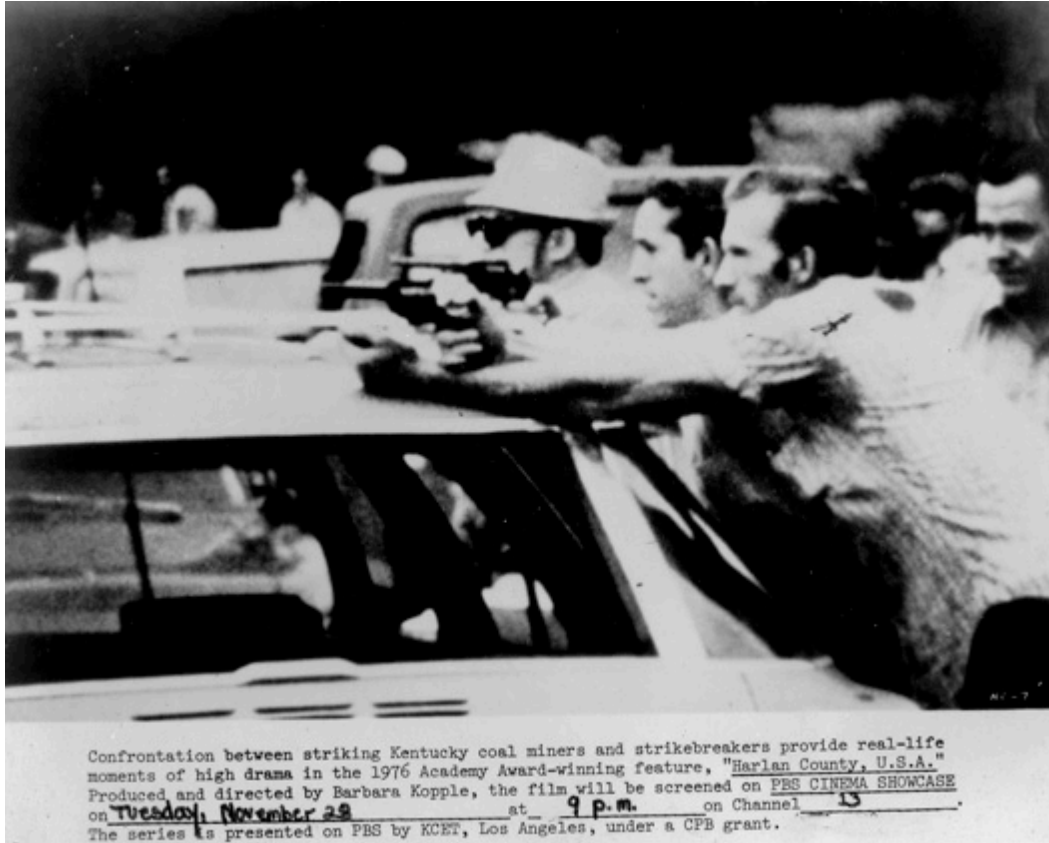
revolutionary potential of the dispossessed of the world, Grierson promoted the ameliorative potential of parliamentary democracy and government intervention to ease the most pressing issues and most serious abuses of a social system that remained fundamentally unquestioned” (2010, 222).

Folklorists and oral historians have a long history of employing film and video in their work, starting as early as 1922 (*Nanook of the North*, Robert J. Flaherty) and continuing to this day. More often, these tools have been used in archival or performance-based processes,<sup>37</sup> but a small percentage of folklorists have made outstanding contributions to documentary tied to social justice. *Harlan County, USA* (1976, Barbara Kopple) was even awarded the Oscar for best documentary feature in 1977. In this film (Figure 5), which covered the Brookside Mine coal miners’ strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, Kopple chose to let the words and actions of the people speak for themselves, rather than using narration to tell the story. According to Jerry Johnson, one of the striking miners, the ultimate conclusion of the strike could be attributed to the presence of Kopple and her film crew: “The cameras probably saved a bunch of shooting. I don’t think we’d have won it without the film crew. If the film crew hadn’t been sympathetic to our cause, we would’ve lost. Thank God for them; thank God they’re on our side.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1937-39, 1952, Gregory Bateson & Margaret Mead), *Hearts and Hands* (1987, Pat Ferrero), *Pizza Pizza Daddy-O* (1969, Bess Lomax Hawes), *I Ain’t Lying: Folktales from Mississippi* (1975, Bill Ferris), or *The High Lonesome Sound: Music Making in the Kentucky Mountains* (1962, John Cohen) as great examples of this genre.

<sup>38</sup> *The Making of Harlan County U.S.A.* DVD extra; appears on *Harlan County U.S.A.* DVD. New York, New York: Criterion Collection, 2006.



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Figure 5. *Harlan County, USA*

Other film groups, such as the Workers' Film and Photo Leagues of the 1920s and 1930s, adopted a *participatory* mode of filmmaking, collaborating with their worker-subjects, thus avoiding the risk of portraying them as "powerless victims" (Barnow 1993, 223), something Grierson has been accused of. These films were known as a cinema of empowerment and, very much like the definition of digital storytelling today, were considered grassroots and oppositional. In 1971, the female members of the San Francisco Newsreel, a film collective that started in late 1960s and considered one of the first feminist documentary collectives, featured first-person narratives and scenes from

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<sup>39</sup> Clip from *Harlan County USA* with PBS notes. Copyright Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

everyday life, which “confirmed women as filmmakers and as political activists” (Barnow 1993, 228). These foundational collectives, using this creative format for inducing critical reflection and self-advocacy has been adopted by individuals engaging in social justice work ever since. From mental health workers to academics specializing in liberation politics, documentary photography and film have developed as participatory processes with a focus on empowerment and social justice. Combined with oral history collection participatory media practices are, in many ways, the precursor to digital storytelling and other forms of art-based advocacy work.

Participatory photography and video is used to empower individuals through the ancient human practice of sharing stories (Bery 2003; Kindon 2003; White 2003) combined with new technologies, which allows for storage and dissemination far beyond the mere act of telling. One of the more empowering aspects of participatory video lies in the control wielded by the producers themselves, in collaboration with technical experts who help them achieve their goals. The creators identify what is important and what they wish to share of themselves—or their community—and they learn the skills necessary to accomplish it. They are then able to spread this learning to others. This central dynamic of participatory video “helps to rearticulate the locus of power within individuals, communities, and ultimately, politics” (Bery 2003, 103).

Participatory video was developed in opposition to more traditional documentary film approaches, in which indigenous knowledge and local initiatives are filmed and disseminated by outsiders. These outsiders, who are often from wealthy and privileged backgrounds use their artistic license to design narrative stories and interpret the meaning of the images/actions that they film (White, 2003). As such, the film is created for the

benefit of outsiders and those that are filmed rarely gain from their participation. The objectives of participatory video are to facilitate empowerment, community self-sufficiency, and vertical and horizontal communication (Buchy 2008). Bery (2003) believes that participatory video *context* “becomes a relatively safe environment in which to tell risky stories that are powerful enough to inspire change” (103).

*Photovoice*, also called “photo novella” and often generally referred to as *participatory photography*, is a research strategy as well as a theoretical framework. In its truest interpretation, it is theory-based praxis, specifically employed with the intention of effecting social change and to “strengthen a community’s problem solving capacity through collective engagement in the research process” (Downey et al. 2009, 419).

Grounded in *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) and feminist standpoint epistemologies, *photovoice* is the brainchild of Carolyn C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris (Wang & Burris 1994), who developed this process as a way to aid village women in China using self-generated photographs of their day-to-day lives. *Photovoice* is designed to “promote the sense of self-esteem, autonomy, and competence that enables women to develop their skills as advocates for themselves and their families” (Wang, Burris, & Ping 1996, 1392). This practice is useful for anyone located on the margins of the power structure; *photovoice* has been employed most often by those involved in public health and health promotion strategies (Wang, Redwood-Jones 2001), but is increasingly being used by sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists (Bell 2009; Packard 2008). Increasingly, it is also being used as a very effective way of engaging youth in social change within their communities—a group that has historically felt left out of discussions involving social policies and civic engagement (Gant et al. 2009; Paul &

Pesch 2007; Piper & Frankham 2007; Streng, Rhodes et al. 2004; Wilson, Dasho, Martin et al. 2007). According to Wang, “photovoice enables people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang 1999, 185). One need not be literate, as the photovoice project does not require reading or writing and those who have physical or developmental disabilities can also participate (Hergenrather, Rhodes et al. 2009).

This process has three basic elements: first, it teaches basic photography skills and gives participants hands-on education in how to use a camera in order to “record and reflect” personal concerns for the community. The second stage in the process centers on the promotion of critical dialogue between community members using the photographs participants have made; and lastly, to reach policy makers and the broader public with the information and insights discovered through this dialogue. The intention is for the critical thought process and engagement with power holders to ripple out from the photovoice project and empower the individual as well as generate action with community leaders and policy makers (Wang, Morrel-Sanders et al 2004).

Within the second phase, where discussion about the images themselves is conducted in the hopes of creating critical dialogue, photovoice often uses a guideline called SHOWED (Table 1):<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hergenrather, K.C., Rhodes, S.D. & Bardhoshi, G. 2009. “Photovoice as community-based participatory research: A qualitative review.” *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 33(6): 686-698.

Table 1. SHOWED Guidelines

<b>S</b> --what do you <b>See</b> ?
<b>H</b> --what is really <b>H</b> appening?
<b>O</b> --how does this affect <b>O</b> ur lives?
<b>W</b> -- <b>W</b> hy does this problem exist?
<b>E</b> --how can we become <b>E</b> mpowered?
<b>D</b> --what can we <b>D</b> o about it?

SHOWED guides individuals to look more deeply at the images they've made and to develop and host forums for presentation (phase three). As a Freirian-based praxis (Freire, 1970)—which has become “almost synonymous with the philosophy of empowerment and participation in public health and community development” (Carlson, et al 2006, 838)—photovoice tends to trigger strong emotional responses from its participants, who are encouraged to recognize their complicity in a given situation as well as that of those in positions of power. This realization leads, through continued critical dialogue, to the awareness that they are also part of the solution. At this stage, individuals begin to become conscious of their own efficacy and are empowered to act. Lynn Warshafsky, co-founder of Venice Arts and fellow at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism has, in collaboration with USC, created the *Institute for*

*Photographic Empowerment* (IPE),<sup>41</sup> in recognition of the growing international movement in arts-based participatory action, as well as a dedication to the fundamental belief in liberation from oppression through education and giving voice to individuals usually shut out of public discourse. IPE (Figure 6) supports the study and practice of participant-produced documentary projects in photography, film, and digital media.



Figure 6. Screen shot from the Institute for Photographic Empowerment

The *Institute for Photographic Empowerment* provides new opportunities for the traditionally disenfranchised, such as those living in chronic poverty, individuals with disabilities, and those living with HIV/Aids, to use their own images to communicate directly with policymakers about the social issues that profoundly affect their lives.

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<sup>41</sup> “The mission of the Institute for Photographic Empowerment (IPE) is to support the study and practice of participant-produced documentary projects in photography, film, and digital media. The Institute is a resource for people from around the globe—photographers, filmmakers, academics, researchers, and project participants—to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop the field.” <http://joinipe.org/welcome/> Last accessed November 25, 2012.



Within the photovoice process, its practitioners believe that with the proper tools, any individual can perceive his or her social and personal reality, including the contradictions, and deal critically with them (Freire 1970; Wang & Redwood-Jones 2001). It does not, however, “attempt to shift power to *decide* policy...it is designed to enable people to reach policy makers and through this process become advocates in their own lives and communities, as they acquire powerful and credible skills” (Wang & Redwood-Jones 2001, 569).

As an off-shoot of the photovoice process, Participatory Video (PV) is a set of techniques employed to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film. A primary idea behind PV is that making a video is easy and accessible, and is a great way of bringing people together to explore issues, voice concerns, or simply to be creative and tell stories. This process can be very empowering, enabling a group or community to take action to solve their own problems and also to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers and/or other groups and communities. (Lunch & Lunch 2006). PV can be a highly effective tool to engage and mobilize marginalized people and to help them implement their own forms of sustainable development based on local needs. Like any participatory process, PV has possible pitfalls. It is all too easy to raise people's expectations only to see their dreams and ideas go nowhere. Lack of transparency or follow-up, and unkept or unreasonable promises can all foster disillusionment. It is equally dangerous to use PV to “add value” to development projects by exploiting the participatory approach. Simply handing over cameras is not participatory video, and doing so without any structure may cause great damage. In the modern world, with our globalized, inter-linked economies and cultures, it has become all

the more important for ordinary people to be heard above the cacophony of over-manipulated dominant-culture media messages. Decision-makers are often isolated from reality, and constrained and over-burdened by bureaucracy. This encourages others to further develop the potential of participatory video as a bridge to link people with central governments and agencies. In participatory video the subjects make their own film in which they can shape issues according to their own sense of what is important, and they can also control how they will be represented. Sol Worth and John Adair were early adopters of participatory media practices, although it was not described as such at the time: "...our object in the summer of 1966 was to determine whether we could teach people with a culture different from ours to make motion pictures depicting their culture and themselves as *they* saw fit" (Worth and Adair 1972, 11), thus recognizing the historical imbalance in documentary generally and anthropology specifically. New forms of media have challenged reductive notions of historical development, especially the idea that historical change is linear, moving from simple to complex, and has played an increasing role in reshaping representations of history (Landy 2001).

Additionally, documentary films are often expected to meet stringent aesthetic standards and are usually made with a large audience in mind. The PV process on the other hand, is less concerned with appearance than with content, and the films are usually made with particular audiences and objectives in mind.

Digital video, in particular, is affordable and easy to use. We have seen since its availability a rise in the autobiographical story and many websites celebrate personal reflection. *Vlogging* (video blogging) and video diaries allow the individual creating them a greater degree of reflection through the process of watching, re-recording, and

editing their diaries before showing them. Rather than focusing on “accuracy” or “realism,” this approach offers individuals more potential to represent themselves; making a video-diary can be an active, empowering, process since it offers a greater editorial control over material disclosed. In the 1980s, we saw a shift to a “new historicism” (Greenblatt 1982) in literary studies, which extended to new or historicizing autobiographical film- and video-making. This work, and the more recent versions of it found in digital storytelling and within various new media outlets, could be said to “straddle the received boundaries of documentary and the avant-garde...and regards history and subjectivity as mutually defining categories” (Renov 2004, 109). The blending of these two elements—normally viewed as somehow separate—allows for a lens that perceives the private, individual story as a “revelation” (110) of public history. Rather than solipsistic, self-representation and the outer world can be seen as mutually constitutive, and begins at the level of the subject.

Not all social justice work is done in small-scale, grassroots projects as *Shoah* (1985), a film by Claude Lanzmann (Figure 7), an early example of visual testimony that illustrates the power and possibility of big budget film as a medium for the genre of the first-person narrative, proved. It runs for over nine hours and features testimonies spoken directly to the camera. Although Lanzmann has stated in interviews “there is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding,”<sup>42</sup> he understood that this type of ‘looking’ is the purest form—it is literally blinding.

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, 1995.



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Figure 7. *Shoah* 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary DVD cover

Numerous Truth and Reconciliation forums have used this format as well in the aftermath of wars in Argentina, Guatemala, South Africa and other countries attempting to come to grips with the horrors of torture and political violence (Edkins 2003).

Film has functioned as a form of artistic expression, a vehicle for profit, and, to use Althusser's language has also been quite successful as a cultural Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser 1971), educating populations as to the rules of "appropriate" or correct behavior through the reproduction of a ruling ideology. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those societies recently emancipated—or in the process of freeing themselves—from their colonizers began to use this medium as a form of social reeducation to accompany the activism of writers such as Franz Fanon. Often at the mercy of U.S.

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<sup>43</sup> Covered by the U.S. fair use laws

imperialism, filmmakers from outside the United States and Europe have been forced to supply these two colonizing regions with films that sated particular imperialist appetites. Although inspired aesthetically by Italian neo-realism and cinema vérité from France (both considered “second cinema” by the Third Cinema filmmakers), the similarities end there. A key difference lies in the active versus passive natures of these film genres. Third or Revolutionary Cinema believes that we are creators of history, rather than consumers of it. Grounded in documentary filmmaking that is “indigestible to the System,” (Solanas and Getino 1976) Revolutionary Cinema tends to focus on a group as the “hero” of the story instead of individual characters (Martinez 2010) as well as expose injustices. It also seeks to promote critical consciousness in both the oppressed, as well as in the oppressor and colonizer nations. These revolutionary filmmakers were interested in the causes, not just the effects, of this oppression and the individual became the site of struggle, referred to as an “activist aesthetic” or “critical spectatorship” (Gabriel 1989, 60). Gabriel also writes of another form of Third Cinema narrative, an autobiographical narrative, which includes a “multi-generational and trans-individual autobiography...where the collective subject is the focus [and] is a mark of solidarity with people’s lives and struggles” (58). According to Martínez (2008), in March of 1959 the Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industria Cinematográfica (ICAIC) was founded to encourage filmmaking and, in fact, it was required that a director make documentaries prior to working for the ICAIC. This documentary aesthetic was a choice that aimed at content and transforming minds rather than making films of beauty (Martínez 2011).

Carlos Diegues, Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos, founded the specifically Brazilian film movement known as *Cinema Novo* (Figure 8).

This auteur film style and its “aesthetic of hunger,” sought to film on location and “attempted to be a popular cinema in the sense that the films were about the people” (ibid.).



Figure 8. *Ganga Zumba*, 1963, film by Carlos Diegues

The “aesthetic of hunger” was a manifesto created to educate Brazilians (and the rest of the world) and “de-alienate” the population using the genre of film, in the concept that Brazilians had been consuming their own poverty and misery in order to feed a hunger for the experience of primitivism by Europeans and North Americans. This was accomplished by Brazilians portraying themselves as the stereotypes desired by the “first-world” powers. The filmmakers hoped to create a social analysis of this process, as well as reveal the ongoing colonization this “hunger” supports. It was very much aligned with the revolutionary cinema growing in other parts of Latin America that also sought to “represent and give voice to the poorest population” (Martinez 2010). This reclamation

of personal experience can be seen as a precursor to the democracy-driven new media movements.

Landsberg (2004) has a valuable concept for this discussion, which she calls *prosthetic memory*. It is a new form of public cultural memory, made possible by new technologies, which emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum. In the moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures him/herself into a larger history. A person does not just apprehend a historical narrative, but actually takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting “prosthetic” memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and political view. Silverman sees this sharing of memories between viewer and storyteller thus:

“If to remember is to provide the disembodied “wound” with a psychic residence, then to remember other people’s memories is to be wounded by their wounds. More precisely, it is to let their struggles, their passions, and their pasts, resonate within one’s own past and present, and destabilize them. Since the new mnemonic matrix which weaves itself around the borrowed memory inevitably shifts the meaning of that memory, it is also to enter into a profoundly dialectical relation to the other, whose past one does not relive precisely as he or she lived it, but in a way which is informed by one’s “own” recollections” (1996, 189).

With the “multimedia revolution,” oral storytelling can be presented in more than “one dimension concurrently, with the acoustic and even visual reality of the performance

becoming an integrated part of the transcription” (Foley 2012, 160). This multi-layered experience offers a way to overcome many of the hindrances imposed by spatial limitations.

### ***Participatory Action Research and New Media***

Challenging the positivist bent the social sciences took in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Participatory Action Research (PAR) is considered a worldview or philosophy based on the “conscientization” or promotion of critical consciousness Paulo Freire (1970) applied to educational praxis. It values the insights and subjectivity of the individual and it focuses on long-term social justice. A term originally coined by Kurt Lewin in 1946 while he was affiliated with MIT, “action research” was defined as “a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” (Lewin 1946)<sup>44</sup>. This mode of research expanded and became more fully as it is known today when Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and author of the immensely influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), combined its basic tenets of collaboration and listening to marginalized members of society, with liberation pedagogy to create what we define as Participatory Action Research today. PAR is a praxis methodology, having two distinct aims: 1) to enable oppressed groups and classes to “wield transforming power” through expression, acts, projects, and “concrete developments”; and 2) to produce and “to elaborate” an individual’s sociopolitical thought (Fals-Borda 1997).

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<sup>44</sup> O’Brien 1998. [http://www.web.net/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html#\\_Toc26184661](http://www.web.net/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html#_Toc26184661)



Split into two “traditions,” PAR can be used in two ways: “a northern tradition that accounts for systemic improvements, and a southern tradition of emancipatory developments” (Burgess 2006, 421). In the southern tradition, giving voice to the poor and oppressed, as well promoting the will and knowledge that one can engage in civic life are in the forefront. PAR grounds itself in the search for equality and the balance of power dynamics between researcher and participants, where research plans are worked out in collaboration. This process is a fertile one that often lends deep insight into community processes as well as existing empirical data (Mason & Clemans 2008). As stated above, this collaboration is done with the specific intention of promoting social change and empowering the often-silent voices of women, youth, the disabled, and other marginalized populations (Downey, Ireson et al, 2009). Moreover, PAR, like feminism is not a research method, per se, but is rather an attitude or a radical epistemology. Although both PAR and feminism have been critical “toward the monopoly of scientific knowledge, PAR is very specific in targeting critically the question of where knowledge resides” (Krumer-Nevo 2009, 280). This, then, is its shared foundation with feminist standpoint theories. In addition, feminist theories have contributed in a significant way to the field of PAR where much of the literature and practice continues to retain an analytic framework that is largely androcentric and where women and gender issues are not always a central aspect of a PAR project. Feminist PAR is characterized by: 1) an emphasis on the lived experiences of women, 2) a focus on the relationship between violence and gendered identities, 3) the activist stance of the researcher, and 4) an emphasis on social change as an integral aspect of social science research (McIntyre 2001).

Similar in practice and framework is Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which includes community members in inquiry conducted with researchers, representatives from various organizations, artists, and educators. All members of the collaboration hold equal value and work as partners, each contributing a unique strength or skill and with the intention of integrating the work into a form of social change that directly affects the community and its members. It is locally based and guided by community members and the people they speak for, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships (Chávez, Israel, Allen, et al, 2004; Minkler 2004; Schaffer 2009). This approach foregrounds ethics and in particular feminist ethics, which is concerned with “oppression and removing systemic, institutionalized discrimination and unequal power balances in relationships...giving a voice in decision making to all involved in the research” (Schaffer 2009, 84). CBPR strives for a balance between research and action, a methodological praxis, founded on eliminating disparities (Minkler and Wallerstein 2003.)

CBPR, used most often in health field research, has been applied to an ever-widening array of disciplines and social issues, from environmental justice to gender-based violence (Bloom, Wagman, Hernandez, et al, 2009; Minkler, Vásquez, Tajik et al, 2008; Sawhney, 2009; Schafer, 2004; Wei and Kramarae, 2008). One area where there seems to be a fertile engagement is in participatory video and photography and their intersection with trauma healing.

A convergence of technology and participatory media practices has opened up entire worlds of possibility for challenging the dissemination of mainstream information. A new model, known as e-PAR, is the growing application of participatory processes

using the autonomous nature of web 2.0 and the ease of use found in digital tools. This shift from the analog process to the digital for local storytelling is reinforcing connections and establishing new networks of solidarity here and abroad. The e-PAR model primarily defines technology as “youth media or a framework incorporating a wide range of communication tools (e.g. the Internet, photography, video and music production software) that promote community development, critical literacy, artistic expression, civic engagement, and social activism (Flicker et al. 2008, 288). Although the authors view “youth media” as being an easy and effective way of engaging youth in a regenerated citizenship since many youth have grown up with the new technologies. However, with a collaborative training process any individual, of any age, can use these tools. Digital storytelling is one of these processes increasingly being employed using the e-PAR model. Moreover, according to Daniel Meadows, a BBC photographer, media producer, and educator in Wales “I believed then and I believe now that this form can be used to open up the airwaves for a wide range of users, in short to give a voice to all those who, until now, have thought of themselves—in a broadcast context anyway—only as part of “the audience.”<sup>45</sup>

New media outlets are currently being used by many in the hopes of harnessing unified networks, empowering marginalized groups, and combating corporate ownership of history and the mainstream news (Gubrium, A. 2009; Nisi, V. et al., 2009; Powell, T. 2005; Sawhney, N., 2009; Schäfer, L., 2004; Soundararajan, 2006; Wei, Z. & Kramarae, C., 2008). Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a woman of Tamil Dalit heritage living in the United States, developed a framework for community-based digital storytelling, and has worked with over 200 communities around the United States developing new media

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.photobus.co.uk/?id=534>

practices (Davis and Weinshenker 2012). Soundararajan expresses concern that mainstream media portray negative images of third world communities that promote passivity and powerlessness, arguing that third world communities need to produce their own media and define what images portray their experience. According to Soundararajan in one interview, “The individualism of computer design is a reflection of Western heritage. It is part of the legacy of consumerism where there is an expectation that people will use their technical devices in the privacy of their homes, alienating and separating people from each other (Lambert 2006, 135).

The broadest challenge to the PAR project is, as Gustavsen (1985) and others have previously pointed out, this fundamental question: how might PAR develop a macro-orientation to democratic dialogue? And might this be accomplished by addressing issues of broader institutional power? By keeping things closely tied to local group dynamics, PAR runs the risk of substituting small-scale participation for genuine democracy and fails to develop strategies for social transformation on all levels (Bebbington 2004; Hickey and Mohan 2005).

Participatory action between citizens, policy writers, social workers, academics, artists, and others using participatory media methods can yield powerful alliances for local communities—something that might become more necessary as federal money runs out for local services such as homeless shelters, aid to families and children, and public education (to name but a few of the recent casualties).

## *Foundations in Power and Agency*

Enlightenment thinkers found their moral compass during the Victorian era, when individuals honed the skills of binary thinking, rejection of the body, silence of the oppressed, and acute conformity into a razor sharp weapon of control. This thinking expressed itself throughout the world as a patriarchal capitalism hell-bent on domination and control of resources. Carrying with them various flags of righteousness, Europeans spread their worldview, and with it, silenced the voices of those who opposed them. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of those who had been silenced began to fight against their oppressors, from Africa to Southeast Asia to the Americas, using their voices through various channels. In 1970, the individual voices of the formerly colonized were recognized with an award from the mainstream literati, thus giving fuel to a movement that centered on an alternative mode of thinking, relating, and history-writing. In 1987, this movement was expanded yet again by Gloria Anzaldúa, a mestiza from the Borderlands between the United States and Mexico. Anzaldúa challenged the patriarchy that had somehow survived, even as a politics of emancipation had matured.

*La facultad*, the “capacity of seeing in surface phenomenon the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (1987, 60), which Anzaldúa believes is latent in all of us, is a survival tactic as well as a way of fighting tyranny. It is an unconscious knowing that is a side effect or by-product of marginalization and it is usually triggered by experiences that produce a “break” from those things we are accustomed to. As this faculty grows in strength and we learn to listen to its messages, a voice that is not ours, diminishes. Her call for a return to the *Coatlicue State* is especially

powerful. In this place, we are forced to listen to the body and our deeper instincts—things rejected by the West as false or inferior—in order that we might retain health, emotional balance, and sacred connections. This is no small thing. We have grown so accustomed to trite depictions of love and the notions of “emotional balance” and “sacred connections” that the deepest meanings of what these things are—and their ability to overcome even the greatest of odds—is scoffed at. *Coatlicue* is the duality in life, the synthesis of that duality, as well as a third aspect, which is more than duality or its synthesis. Fusing together disparate strands of experience and knowledge has the potential for creating resistance that can reach far beyond small localized attempts—not to detract from the individual transgression where all things must begin—but a unification of contestation based on a common desire for social justice. The *Coatlicue State* has great applications in its intersection with new media and the possibility for a unifying force is more possible now than ever before for those who are able to access a computer and Internet connection.

Domination and inequality are not simple one-way processes. They are, rather, negotiated and complex forms of coercion where we might engage in what Bourdieu calls an “epistemic radicalism” (1998, 36). Challenging the root of the meaning and structure of domination, by explicitly identifying the epistemology of subordination and the mechanisms of social control, perhaps we can “sublimate and transcend” the moral conformism of those with political power. “Put more simply: rendering explicit brings about a destructive alteration when the entire logic of the universe rendered explicit rests on the taboo of rendering it explicit” (Bourdieu 1994, 113). He states that we must engage in a “reconstruction of genesis” (1994, 40), meaning we must reanimate the past,

and all the “discarded possibles” therein. By so doing, we illuminate the many paths society could have taken and can still follow. Digital storytelling attempts to do just that. By creating ways to remember local stories, ones that quite often run against the grain of legitimized history, we “sublimate and transcend” accounts of “official” history. Bourdieu’s notion of *field* and *habitus* is a potential framework by which to navigate this intersection of subjective experience and the wider power structure. In terms of social structure, Bourdieu writes:

This social structure is not immutable, and the topology that describes a state of the social positions permits a dynamic analysis of the conservation and transformation of the structure of the active properties’ distribution and thus of the social space itself. That is what I mean when I describe the global social space as a *field*, that is, both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other...the notion of the field of power to account for structural effects which are not otherwise easily understood...(1998, 32-33).

Moreover, “for while the field sets certain limits on practice, nonetheless the actions of agents also shapes the habitus of the field and hence the field itself (Adkins, 2004, p. 194). This is the location digital storytelling can be found, as many projects seek to transform local communities literally through small points within a geographic setting, an individual’s experience, or an organizational framework.

Silence is often mistaken for agreement when in actuality it is fear of rejection (Noelle-Newmann 1984) or simply absence of representation (Van Zoonen 1994); worse

yet, we have grown used to the ways of organizing things that ignore voice, that assume some voices do not matter, where others are valued as “expert.” We are experiencing a “contemporary crisis of voice,” across political, economic and cultural domains and it has been growing for at least three decades (Couldry 2010). Dolby-Stahl perceives expression as an individual’s “most fundamental yet difficult task—the momentary ‘breakthrough’ from personal reality into cultural reality” and believes that “through them, individuals assert their connection with other people” (1989, 120). Code has addressed this issue as being an epistemological one: “monological epistemologies tend to downgrade testimony unevenly, according to whose it is; how they suppress the affective aspects of cognition and obliterate its cooperative, interactive aspects; how they mask their own complicity in structures of power and privilege” (1995, xiv). We are invited to consider not only the “results of understanding” but can, in fact, live through another’s process of gaining that insight by permitting us to enter the “living space” of someone wholly different from us and it “specifically provides for the complicit engagement of the listener” (Rosen 1988, 81).

According to the feminist standpoint theorists, the subjective realm, or the lived experience, is a privileged location, seen as the grounds of genuine knowledge (Aptheker 1989; Benmayor 2009; Clough 1994; Denzin 1997; Hill-Collins 2000; hooks 1994; McNay 2004; Minh-Ha 1991; Moraga 1983; Ramsdell 1997; Spivak 1990). Directly contradicting scientific methodology and its insistence on “objectivity,” these feminists recognized that “the granting of epistemological privilege to experience in this way is a contentious strategy because it pushes feminism dangerously close to an unexamined empiricism which does not scrutinize the conditions that determine how experience



relates to knowledge,” (McNay 2004, 178). It does, however, bring to light “the impact of silence and repression upon the lives of marginalized groups” (179).

Hill-Collins delineates four dimensions for a rethinking of a politicized epistemological process: “lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring” (Hill-Collins 2000, 266). According to Wang et al (2000), power accrues to those “who have voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions” (82). This project seeks to uncover the connections between voice and self efficacy through individual expression and subjective experience. This is particularly interesting when creating dialogue between “marginalized” individuals and communities and those in positions of power, where a re-ordering of institutional, as well as social, interaction is necessary for an individual’s story to be heard. Web 2.0 allows for this possibility through digital technologies and inclusive networks, which contextualize as well as politicize the dissemination of knowledge. Mignolo (2000) combines history, politics, and what he proposes as *gnosis*—a “border thinking” that transcends “the notion of ‘knowledge’ beyond cultures of scholarships” (9)—into a call for “constructing new loci of enunciation as well as for reflecting that academic ‘knowledge and understanding’ should be complemented with ‘learning from’ those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies” (5). He also calls for a “desubalternization” of knowledge and “expanding the horizon of human knowledge beyond the academy and beyond the Western concept of knowledge and rationality” (7). Rewriting history to include the voices of the disenfranchised has been an ongoing process. The voices, experiences, and realities of those outside the mainstream have been systematically blocked from historical archives

as well as wholly distinctive in crucial ways. This reconstitution of knowledge is essential in order to fill large gaps in knowledge due to this basic discontinuity: these perspectives are not absent simply as a result of oversight but have been suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom by dominant research traditions institutionalized in academic settings and in scientific disciplines (Anderson, Armitage et al. 1990).

Fusing discursive action with praxis by connecting students, educators, activists, and citizens from across the globe is a way of “remembering against the grain of “public” or hegemonic history, of locating the silences and the struggle to assert knowledge that is outside the parameters of the dominant, suggests a rethinking of sociality itself,” (Mohanty 2004, 83). Working outside of a commitment to the people who are directly involved is doomed to failure or is a perpetuation of domination at the very least. “Leaders cannot treat the oppressed as mere activists to be denied the opportunity of reflection and allowed merely the illusion of acting, whereas in fact they would continue to be manipulated—and in this case by the presumed foes of manipulation” (Freire 1970, 126). *Conscientization* is a term created by Freire that refers to the belief that to overcome oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes so they may then move forward through action that transforms, hence creating a new situation in which they are in control. Through this form of education, people become agents in their own lives and communities. The educational contract between classes is referred to as a liberation pedagogy, which seeks to empower individual citizens through education—this includes the gatekeepers who help (or hinder) a more just society—to advocate for themselves and each other.

Creating this alternative culture, which makes transparent the axes of power, is the trajectory in the digital storytelling movement as I see it, working toward the incorporation of each individual into the collective, local power structure. This can be particularly challenging when working with youth, who may hold great sway in terms of the marketers and advertisers, but have virtually no rights or involvement in the socio-political arena. This becomes more of a possibility when looking at traditionally marginalized populations who are not even on the radar of advertisers, such as those living in chronic poverty or are homeless. Fraser (2000) uses the term “misrecognition” as a way of describing a form of status subordination that renders one invisible as far as the power structure is concerned: “misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination—in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. To redress this injustice still requires a politics of recognition, but in the ‘status model’ this is no longer reduced to a question of identity: rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest” (113). Fraser recognizes that a redistribution of resources is also necessary, but recognizing media as the wielders of power on a social level, is paramount in terms of presentation, re-presentation, and recognition. *Subpolitics* “represents a new mode of operation of the political, in which agents coming from outside the officially recognized political and corporate system appear on the stage of social design, including different professional groups and organizations, citizens’ issue-centered initiatives and social movements, and finally, individuals (Bakardjieva 2009, 94-95).

Digital storytelling, in principle, is an avenue for self-representation, which is capable of bestowing feelings of self-worth and self-recognition. These things can then be shared with others; individuals can speak for themselves, “to tell important stories about oneself—to represent oneself as a social, and therefore potentially political, agent” (Couldry 2009, 54). According to Hull and Katz (2006), who based their theory of a “crafted agential self” on Bruner (1994), in autobiographical accounts, there often exist “turning points” which we can understand as “thickly agentic” and rather than viewing them as “simply true reports of past events” we see them as ways the teller of a story might “clarify his or her Self-concept” (45). These turning points may thus serve as “emblems or tropes for how one thinks of one’s life as a whole” (ibid.).

### ***The “Testimonio” as a Framework for Resistance***

In 1970, the Cuban forum Casa de las Américas awarded its first prize for *testimonio*, thus making the genre “official.” Although it effectively started in Cuba, it swiftly moved to South America where it developed in response to the military repression in Argentina and Chile. Military violence in Nicaragua and other Central American countries opened the floodgates of *testimonio* and the 1980s saw numerous *testimonio* projects, as well as articles and essays that critically analyzed the genre. The *testimonio* has been debated for nigh on forty years. Some of the more famous narratives—*I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Figure 9) is perhaps the most well known—have come under fire for the validity of some of the statements made (anthropologist David Stoll’s attacks on Menchú are an example of this). Bartow (2005) makes an astute observation when she

states that the (Menchú) controversy had the greatest impact in the U.S. and that, in the end, the controversy “*not* the text or its importance, is based on what Menchú’s testimony is for *us*, for *our* western civilization courses, for *our* preconceived notion of truth’s function and authentic indigenous culture” (67).

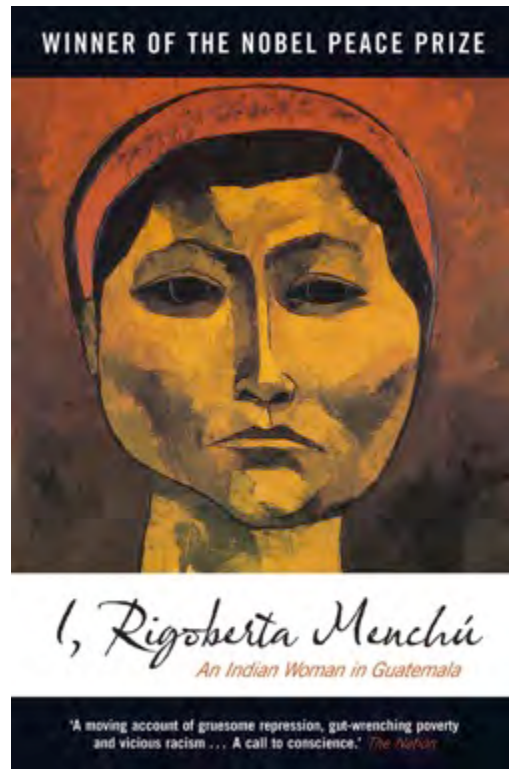


Figure 9. I, Rigoberta Menchú book cover<sup>46</sup>

Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her *testimonio* and tireless work for Guatemala’s indigenous farmers; it is worth noting that American academics spent a good deal of time trying to debunk her. This is precisely the sort of resistance individuals meet up with when applying pressure to the canon and institutionalized violence and inequality. “The trend among academics seems to question the proposition of *testimonio*,

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<sup>46</sup> © Verso 1984, 2009

to attempt to desanctify its keenly centered position as the epitome of ‘resistance literature’ and thereby repudiate its validity” (Dulfano 2004). As John Beverley states, “I continue to see in testimonio...a model for a new form of politics, which also means a new way of imagining the identity of a nation” (2004).

Definition: The *testimonio* is a first-person narrative genre developed in “close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of the 1960s...the narrator...speaks for, or in the name of, a community or group...is both an art and a strategy of subaltern memory” (Beverley 2004). It is not “product-oriented like the traditional (male-defined) news story” (Randall 1996). The *testimonio* “has contributed to the demise of the traditional role of the intellectual/artist as spokesperson for the ‘voiceless’ and...coincides with one of the fundamental tenets of postmodernity: the rejection of what Jean-François Lyotard [1984] calls grand or master narratives, which function to legitimize political or historical teleologies” (Yúdice 1991). It is more political than it is literary (Moreiras 1995). The narrator “belongs to an oppressed, excluded, and/or marginal group and speaks/writes as a member of that group (Maier 2004), and in regards to the content in the *testimonio*, it offers “essential (indispensable) subversions of official history and discourse” (Bartow 2004). At its most basic level, the *testimonio* is embedded in resistance movements and struggles and the intellectuals who serve as the interlocutors for the witnesses see their actions as being in solidarity with the individuals. There is a “sense of sisterhood and mutuality in the struggle against a common system of oppression” (Mallon 2001). “It has been suggested that testimony is the literary—or discursive—mode par excellence of our times, and that our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony...to testify is thus not merely to

narrate but to commit oneself...to *take responsibility*—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence” (Felman 1991, 39-40). The aspect of voice that matters most then for “voice as a value” is people’s practice of giving an account, implicitly or explicitly, of the world within which they act...we define voice at one level as the capacity to make, and be recognized as making, narratives about one’s life” (Couldry 2010, 7).

Extending these definitions into the multimedia realm, digital storytelling is, in its most distilled form, the current manifestation of this oral-political practice. Organizations such as the Trauma Healing Project<sup>47</sup> and Silence Speaks<sup>48</sup> are but two in a growing global network applying liberation consciousness to the use of digital technology. Where previously photographs, documentaries, and oral storytelling were shown only to those in the local area in formats such as gallery showings, public art displays, theaters, or in public schools and buildings, they can now be experienced across the globe through websites and online digital archives. Individuals who suffer injustices wrought by corporate practices, for example, may now go online and locate others who are experiencing the same forms of abuse. Women who cannot receive justice in crimes of sexual assault may now find advocacy through networks such as the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network,<sup>49</sup> something that was unimaginable fifteen years ago. Giving value to the individual voice is the goal in DST workshops and most digital stories are made with the help of volunteers and facilitators who possess a desire for social justice.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.healingattention.org/> “Promoting Liberation and Justice Through Healing.” Last accessed on November 25, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> *Silence Speaks* is an international digital storytelling initiative “supporting the telling and witnessing of stories...of surviving and thriving in the wake of violence and abuse, armed conflict, or displacement, and of challenging stigma and marginalization.” <http://www.silencespeaks.org/> Last accessed on November 25, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> RAINN, (<http://www.rainn.org/>) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization and was named one of "America's 100 Best Charities" by Worth magazine. Last accessed November 25, 2012.

I have sought in this literature review to highlight very diverse areas of scholarship that all seek empowerment of the individual voice and recognize that this process eventually leads to social justice and personal efficacy. Although historically problematic, a meeting place can be found if one starts at the local or grassroots level. This is, at the most basic level, what my research attempts to do: build a bridge between disciplines working toward the same ends but which traditionally do not communicate with one another. For example, sociologists and anthropologists have used the *Photovoice* process but have not built alliances with literary studies. Communication scholars place a fair amount of weight on visual communication and documentary, but have rarely—if at all—used the *Photovoice* or other forms of participatory media practices. Folklorists use many of the theoretical frameworks found in literary studies but do not often situate themselves in discourses of power and agency. Many of these disciplines are working for social justice but are not grounded in a praxis-based epistemological framework. This research highlights experience as a valid measure of personal feelings of betterment. It also looks for connections, much in the same vein as I have written about above using Bakardjieva's term *Subpolitics*, and seeks to advance the first-person experience within digital storytelling scholarship, which has, heretofore focused on the stories themselves and the process of creating a story, rather than on the individual experience of the storytellers themselves.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODS

*“Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit—in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever.”*

*—Chinua Achebe*

#### ***Methodology***

Taking into consideration the praxis-based theoretical underpinnings of this project, and although this is not an ethnographic study, oral history collection is intimately tied to this practice, although it far outdates it. I believe it is important to recognize the contested history of the place traditionally afforded the first-person narrative in scholarly work. With this in mind, I will address methodological issues first, followed by a description of the methods whereby I answer my research questions.

In 1959, C. Wright Mills<sup>50</sup> challenged researchers and academics to connect the personal experiences of individuals to social issues, to contextualize the stories in history and apply these insights to social and methodological issues. The canonical texts of ethnographic fieldwork as created by early scholars such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas became the foundational guidelines for participant-observation and proved to be quite fruitful to scholars throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, many times fostering a deeper

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<sup>50</sup> *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press.

understanding of the Western worldview (Boas, 1909; Geertz, 1973; Malinowski, 1922; Mead, 1928). As other disciplines sought acceptance from the academy they, too, adopted the methods of these social scientists, formalizing guidelines and rules for conducting rigorous and methodologically “sound” research; all “inquiry was judged against a narrow set of criteria, objective, valid, reliable, accounts of the “Other” and his or her way of life” (Denzin 2010, 23).

In the last two to three decades, however, a whisper of dissatisfaction from the margins has grown into a full-bodied voice of resistance from those who have often been the subjects of those ethnographies. These monological ethnographic works were written with the intention of making sense of the complexity and interconnectedness of culturally driven practices and norms (boyd 2008). These ethnographies were also written, for the most part, in a non-reciprocal way and with little or no concern or empowerment for the subjects. Reflexivity, where one openly situates oneself in any given situation or context, should illuminate the biases and preconceptions that inform our interpretations and move us forward in a direction of collectivity that does not privilege one interpretation over another (Lawless 1992). This, however, is still not the case in many qualitative or quantitative research projects. Attending to the historical abuses of power, many of those who were the subjects of research have demanded more involvement in the process by which texts are written about them. Moreover, a genuine recognition by (primarily white) scholars of their own filters and subjectivities when dealing with lives very different from their own has also been demanded by these individuals. bell hooks has written about the power of the voice and speaking up: “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a

gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice” (1990, 340). This sentiment is echoed in the digital storytelling work of Benmayor (2009), who guides her students in a course at California State University, Monterey Bay called Latina Life Stories, to “write back” in their personal stories. “Writing back was to be intentionally testimonial and dialogic, a response to an experience and a reply to social structures, institutions, individuals and ideologies that shaped that experience. “Writing For” asked students to identify their intended audiences. As storytellers, who did they intentionally seek to reach and who might benefit from seeing and hearing their story?”<sup>51</sup>

This challenge to traditional ethnography and academic exclusion was instigated, in many ways, by Vine Deloria’s critique of anthropology in *Custer Died for Your Sins* in 1969. The chorus and rejection of Eurocentric methodology by Native peoples around the world has only grown since 1969 to include the voices of African Americans, women, the homeless, and others often located outside the officially sanctioned sources of information and history. Research is thus a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and techniques of resisting by the “Other.” It is “one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized...through formal rules of scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms” (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999, 7).

Previous use of the term *collaboration* meant collaboration between researchers, rather than between researcher and consultant. This recognizes that our consultants, like

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<sup>51</sup> *Theorizing Through Digital Stories: The Art of "Writing Back" and "Writing For."*  
<http://www.academiccommons.org/commons/essay/theorizing-through-digital-stories/> Last accessed Jan. 24, 2013.

us, have a vested interest in how their language and its meaning are represented. This is particularly sound when working in the digital storytelling environment, as personal language is an important element of the process, as is the storyteller's control of the story and its dissemination. Sandoval (2000) has a useful way of situating this process as one she refers to as a "methodology of the oppressed," a theory and method of oppositional consciousness that belongs to no single population, no race, gender, sex, or class except for the subordinated who seek empowerment. In fact, she believes that the "effects of oppressed speech upon dominant forms of perception [are responsible] for the new modes of reading and analysis that have emerged during the U.S. post-World War II period [and] are fundamentally linked to the voices of subordinated peoples" (8). In relation to the experience of the storytellers themselves, once a story has been recorded, it can be analyzed as a discrete phenomenon, its generation "by some particular individual(s) at a given place and time for some specific reason(s) that makes it meaningful for human beings and explains its reason for being" (Georges and Jones 1995, 310). Feminist and emancipatory research seeks, ultimately, the transformation of society through the empowerment and emancipation of the individual (Grbich 2007). These thoughts are the framework and impetus for this study.

I will now outline the steps I have taken in the praxis of this framework, facilitating the expression of voice in those who inhabit "the margins" of U.S. society and have engaged in the digital storytelling process.

## *Methods*

This project relies on secondary evaluation data collected on behalf of the Trauma Healing Project, located in Eugene, Oregon, during digital storytelling workshops based on the model created by the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California. These workshops occurred between December 2010 and October 2012 and involved individuals from age 11 to 70 from the following agencies: Phoenix Program (participants aged 13-18), Looking Glass Youth and Family Services Rural Program (participants aged 11-16), Full Access (participants aged 21-70) and Oregon Supported Living Program (participants aged 21-70). Individuals who volunteered to participate in the evaluation were informed before hand that de-identified information they share through the process may be used in written reports, trainings, or publications. The process was explained thoroughly, confidentiality was assured, and everyone was allowed to opt out completely or to stop the evaluation process at any time without risk to their involvement in any program, or to them personally, for anything they decided to share or not to share. Youth in the Phoenix Program were asked to sign an assent form and no incentives were given in exchange for their participation. The workshop was considered part of an art-based treatment program within the Phoenix Program and decided upon by each teen and their treatment team, in collaboration with their parents. Teens in the Looking Glass program signed an assent form, their parents signed their consent, and each was given a \$50 gift card (supplied by Looking Glass) in exchange for their participation. In the THP workshops, unlike the CDS-led ones that I have been a part of, meeting times are broken up to accommodate various needs, so rather than then traditional 3-5 day, all day,

workshops, often THP will run two-week, half-days workshop or a “retreat” that consists of a weekend sleepover (this has been done with youth only).

Interviews and closing circles were audio recorded and each participant was given a written evaluation form to fill out. No names or identifying markers are found on the data supplied by THP. The data used in this study was returned to the Trauma healing Project upon completion of analysis, where it is kept in a password-protected hard drive and written evaluations are kept in a locked cabinet in the executive director’s office.

### *The Organizations*

**The Trauma Healing Project** (THP) began as a project in November 2003, spearheaded by Elaine Walters, the executive director. This first meeting drew about 30 community members together from different walks of life who gathered in a mutual recognition that a profound lack of understanding existed as far as trauma and its survivors were concerned. In this meeting, those in attendance discussed whether an interest existed to better understand trauma and to educate themselves about how we, as a community, think about trauma. This discussion spanned a continuum of intent, from educating each other about what services already existed for trauma survivors on one end to thoughts of starting a community center on the other. Both sides of the spectrum eventually came to pass and the Trauma Healing Project formed as a non-profit in November of 2007. In May of 2008 the Internal Revenue Service approved their application, back-dating their status as a non-profit to 2007. The THP has expanded to include body work and, pertinent to this study, digital storytelling.

The first DST workshop occurred in 2009, led by Jacqueline Novet, a social worker who had been volunteering at the THP and who had, of her own accord, attended a CDS-led workshop previous to becoming involved with THP. Twelve DST workshops have been facilitated at THP since 2009. According to Walters, storytelling is important for trauma survivors and one of our most basic human drives.<sup>52</sup> She describes it by explaining that children show their pain through expression (crying, screaming, etc.). This expression from the pain is not the pain itself and when even well-meaning adults attempt to comfort or quiet them, the expression is suppressed. Repeated suppression leads to a shutting down of expressive tools and our natural healing processes. In trauma survivors, this can also lead to drug addiction and other forms of abuse as a way of relieving the symptoms of suppressed emotions. Storytelling with a witness, rather than in isolation, creates safety and connection and can, according to Walters, neutralize this learned behavior and is essential to healing from trauma. In the DST workshop environment, THP attempts to create an environment where an “enlightened witness” may emerge. This process is accomplished by staying close with the storytellers, listening, and responding to stories in a non-judgmental way that validates their experience rather than quiets them. She also believes that trauma survivors are haunted by past trauma and the DST process allows the survivor to control the story and its expression. A challenge for trauma survivors and one THP actively works to prevent, is showing their stories to an untrained or unsupportive audience. This is especially true just after the completion of a story, when hearts are open from having shown it to positive and accepting listeners in the workshop. Guidance by THP staff and workshop

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<sup>52</sup> Personal communication, April 17, 2013.

volunteers in who each storyteller decides to show their story to, post-workshop, is also an important characteristic of the process.

The THP currently contracts with the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to develop a reentry model for older youth returning to Lane County after incarceration in an OYA Youth Correctional Facility. In recognition of the correlation between delinquency, criminality, and unresolved trauma, the THP has also been working to develop a support group and expressive arts activities to meet the needs of this population. OYA was founded in June, 1995, as Senate Bill 1, to administer youth correctional facilities and programs within a multi-tiered system of sanctions, and to provide leadership in a coordinated statewide juvenile justice system. The Oregon Youth Authority became a division of the Oregon Department of Human Resources in 1995 and in January 1996, the Oregon Youth Authority became an independent department of the State of Oregon.<sup>53</sup> The Second Chance Act, signed into being in April of 2008, designed to improve outcomes for people returning to communities after incarceration, this first-of-its-kind legislation authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, survivor support, and other services that can help reduce recidivism.<sup>54</sup> It was from this grant that the Trauma Healing Project was awarded a contract to facilitate a collaboration between community partners and a youth reentry support group. DST became a part of this collaboration in 2009 when THP hosted its first digital storytelling workshop.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.oregon.gov/oia/pages/history.aspx>

<sup>54</sup> [http://reentrypolicy.org/government\\_affairs/second\\_chance\\_act](http://reentrypolicy.org/government_affairs/second_chance_act)



This study is based on a continuation of this collaborative effort in workshops conducted with the following organizations:

**The Phoenix Program**, a program within the Department of Youth Services, is housed in the Juvenile Justice Center building on the John Serbu Youth Campus in Eugene, Oregon. The Phoenix Program has been in operation since March of 2005, and is a cognitive behavioral skill-based program designed to help “understand the physiology of anger, reduce incidences of anger, and increase conflict resolution skills.”<sup>55</sup> This program prepares youth to return to their community with new skills for school and community success. Most return home with intensive community-based services. This cognitive behavioral treatment program helps youth take responsibility for their choices and actions, and assists them in understanding the relationship between their thoughts and actions, and helps them build on positive strength-based experiences and change. The Department of Youth Services (DYS) serves youth aged 12-17 referred by local law enforcement as a result of delinquent behavior and provides juvenile corrections services and treatment options that use delinquency reduction strategies. Treatment includes alcohol and other drug treatment, family counseling, sex offender treatment, mental health services, skill-building classes, amongst others. Treatment is not mutually exclusive from corrections responses. For example, skill-building classes are emphasized while juvenile offenders are in detention. This balanced response of corrections and treatment works to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their actions, provide

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<sup>55</sup><http://www.lanecounty.org/departments/hhs/ys/documents/options%20to%20anger%20for%20the%20phoenix%20program.pdf>

sanctions for their criminal behavior, and give them opportunities for reformation.<sup>56</sup> Treatment includes very focused and intensive services that are delivered via a master service plan and the implementation and monitoring of that plan by a treatment team. The Phoenix Program is certified by DHS (Department of Human Services) to provide voluntary treatment in a residential care facility for youth. Participation in the Phoenix Program is voluntary and youth and their families can decide to end their participation at any time. Youth who have been in the program for at least one month and who are not scheduled to leave less than two weeks after the workshop are invited to participate in the digital storytelling workshop. They are supported by Phoenix Program staff to develop their story prior to the workshop, and have access to counselors and program staff before, during, and after their participation in the workshop.

**Looking Glass Youth and Family Services**, is the largest private, nonprofit provider of services for troubled youth in Lane County, Oregon, in operation since 1970. Youth and their parents voluntarily choose affiliation with Looking Glass. This county organization helps teenagers cope with the difficult issues related to abuse, neglect, educational deficits, mental health issues, drug addiction and homelessness. The Looking Glass Rural Program (LGRP) assists youth in Cottage Grove, Oregon, ages 11-17, who are homeless, runaway, or at risk of homelessness interested in creating long-term solutions that improve their lives. LGRP “helps young people on their road to safety and

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<sup>56</sup><http://www.lanecounty.org/departments/cao/budget/documents/adopted%2011%2012/youth%20services.pdf>

stability.”<sup>57</sup> The workshop was conducted at the Opal Center in Cottage Grove, Oregon. The **Opal Center** began as an art cooperative in downtown Cottage Grove. From a small group of artists and volunteers, an artistic community developed to create theater performances, fashion shows and parades, and it hosts affordable community classes covering fitness, computers, crafting and more; it is an educational resource center and an art/music/film co-operative.<sup>58</sup>

**Full Access** is one of multiple brokerages for adults with developmental disabilities throughout the state of Oregon, opening in March of 2002. Brokerages are the result of a class action suit and court settlement between the State of Oregon and the Federal government in 2000, phased in over six years, 2000-2006. This settlement, called the Staley settlement, was in response to a lawsuit filed on behalf of five individuals with developmental disabilities who were eligible for services but not receiving them. The Staley Settlement calls for “universal access” to self-directed Support Services for all adults with developmental disabilities. Full Access was established through the collaborative effort of people with disabilities, advocates, providers, and the support of mental health/developmental disability personnel in 2001. The founders of Full Access shared a commitment for developing a brokerage that would be knowledgeable about local disability issues and committed to the personal choices of individuals with developmental disabilities. The overarching philosophy of Full Access is a respect for the right of every person with developmental disabilities to “exercise control in pursuing, developing, achieving, and maintaining a quality of life consistent with their preferences

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.lookingglass.us/> Last Accessed January 22, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.opalcentercg.org/> Last Accessed February 19, 2013.

and choices.”<sup>59</sup>

**Oregon Supported Living Program (OSLP)** began in 1978 through the inspiration of Dan Close and Valerie Taylor, under the auspices of the University of Oregon. Their initial endeavor was a semi-independent living program, which provided various support services for individuals with mild disabilities who maintained their own residences in Eugene. In 1987, OSLP expanded to serve persons with more complex disabilities who had been displaced by the closure of Siuslaw Care Center in Florence and the downsizing of Fairview Training Center, a state institution in Salem, Oregon. In July of 1988, OSLP separated formal administrative ties with the University of Oregon and became a private non-profit corporation. OSLP has been nationally recognized as an example of barrier-free living for persons in wheelchairs, and maintains a high standard of living for all their residents. The mission at Oregon Supported Living Program is to provide support in ways that will enhance the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of those they serve while providing each individual the opportunity to become an integral member of the community.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Workshops*

#### **First Meeting**

The first meeting in a digital storytelling workshop is always interesting. Most everyone is excited, maybe nervous, definitely looking forward to finding out just how

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.fullaccess.org/> Last Accessed April 18, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.oslp.org/> Last Access January 22, 2013.

one goes about making a “digital story.” The volunteers have been meeting for a couple of weeks already (either in person or through cyberspace) and have, on this first day, already been organizing the space in anticipation. The Trauma Healing Project hosts all the workshops in what is fondly referred to as the “Digital Storytelling Playground,” located in the THP building, with the exception of those that have been conducted with the Phoenix Program and Looking Glass workshop, which was held at the Opal Center in Cottage Grove. The Phoenix Program workshops were held on the John Serbu campus, as the youth are not free to leave and they had been granted special privilege to leave “the pod” (a term for their living space) and meet us in a room that has outside access. This privilege is a result of a rewards system and most of the DST participants are near the end of their time in the program. It is an earned reward that we are able to take them outside for fresh air during breaks.

At the THP facility as the storytellers wander in, and in the case of the Full Access and OSLP workshops, their assistants and caregivers, folks help themselves to coffee, soda, juice, tea, and food. Food in the morning usually consists of bagels, fruit, cream cheese, and protein bars. Lunch is either prepared at the space or brought in, about half the time the agency partnered with THP supplies lunch. Computers are set up, but not used until late in the day, as the focus at this point in the process is on finding and writing the story, and face-to-face communication between storytellers and volunteers.

This first day’s meeting and mingling tends to feel like an appraisal time. Who are people drawn to? Are there certain places in the room people are drawn to? Who is hesitant being here? Or is not hesitant at all? As a facilitator, these things are considered even as mundane machinations like making sure the printer works and all the computers

are ready to go are dealt with. As we come together for the first opening circle, people begin to settle into their places—places in the circle they tend to return to at every circle, although it is encouraged that people mix it up and sit next to new people. By the end of the workshop, it is not uncommon for strangers to have become friends and the encouragement is no longer needed.

As people find their places, first draft of their stories in hand (or sometimes in their heads), the executive director of the Trauma Healing Project, Elaine Walters, generally calls together the first meeting. Everyone takes a moment, looking at the strangers they will come to trust and share often intense personal stories. But for now, people are fairly quiet, obviously filled with anticipation, and sometimes extremely uncomfortable. This last emotion is more obvious when working with youth, but I have seen it in adults as well. Even though they have all chosen to participate, there are times when a last-minute fear can cause someone to reconsider their involvement. Although no one has ever left a workshop altogether, one storyteller attended the first day, failed to return the second as the workshop “brought up stuff” he decided he didn’t want to deal with, but returned on the third and ended up completing his project with much pride. In any event, in this first circle the emotion is palatable. After introductions, all members make group agreements where certain things are decided upon for the duration of the workshop. These generally feature things like “respect the speaker,” or “what happens in the circle stays in the circle.” Often this list can get quite long as participants begin defining what they are comfortable with and what they will not abide by. A trust is formed as we all agree to this pact. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, at a future point, something to the effect of “No cell phones in the circle!” as a reminder. In my

experience, people tend to stick to the agreements and the agreements seem to set individuals at ease. The space has become a “safe zone” and is part of the reason storytellers are able to open up. It is also at this time where it is announced to the youth participants, that we are obligated, according to Oregon law, to report any ongoing threat, neglect, or abuse to them or another minor they might speak of in the workshop.<sup>61</sup>

Following these agreements and small break, everyone gathers once again for the central element of the workshop: the Story Circle.

### **The Story Circle**

The Story Circle is a deep, core experience within the workshop. It is akin to the notion of testimony and witnessing: “To bear witness is to take responsibility for truth...to testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness's stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bound by an oath” (Felman 1991, 103-104). This portion of the process can often be highly emotional, as storytellers read aloud the story they’ve decided they want to turn into a multimedia project. Since the storytellers sometimes come without having written their story down on paper or computer, they may tell it free-form and write it down later with the help of an assistant. No limitations are given to each storyteller as to the story they choose to write, other than a parameter of 350 words, although at this first telling they are not bound by the final word count. Most individuals choose, of their own accord, to tell a story that involves trauma or some form of wounding, although there

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<sup>61</sup> Various laws covering these populations offer differing definitions of abuse and different penalties for failing to report. But there is a lot of common ground such as any evidence of physical injury, neglect, sexual or emotional abuse, or financial exploitation.  
[http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/abuse/pages/mandatory\\_report.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/abuse/pages/mandatory_report.aspx)

have been a few stories that were humorous and light. Without prompting, most people—young and old—use this opportunity for relating a very intense experience where they have not been in control of the situation. Sometimes they are telling this story for the first time and end up speaking for a lengthy amount of time. Although in actuality no one is ever cut off before the complete telling of a story, Story Circles are prefaced with a “suggested” time of 15-20 minutes for each storyteller. The circle tends to run from 1.5 to 3 hours on average, but varies from workshop to workshop. Making a digital story seems to take control of the experience back by allowing an individual to tell it in their own way and by deciding, from start to finish, who will hear it, how it will be visualized, and who will see the final multimedia version, although there is an agreement that all present at the workshop will see it at the end in the group screening.

After telling their story, the circle opens up to questions and comments, should the storyteller wish it; this process has multiple purposes. Firstly, it reinforces group cohesion; secondly, it aids in the editing process; and lastly, it begins the transformative possibilities of the workshop for participants.

### **Working on the Projects**

After conclusion of the Circle, people begin editing their stories either alone or with the help of workshop volunteers (whichever they prefer). Instruction on Mac computers, file management, and Internet research using Creative Commons is given at intervals while editing continues. When storytellers feel their stories are ready, and have been typed and printed out, each person is taken to a room that has been set up as a “recording booth” (usually a closet or small room) and they are guided through the audio



recording of their story. For many, this is best accomplished through short readings of each sentence or paragraph rather than one take and often it is necessary for many repetitions until the storyteller feels good about the sound and feel. This audio recording then becomes the narration track in each digital story. Once all storytellers have their audio recordings completed, the video editing instruction and the building of the stories begins.

I have noted one very clear trend in video editing instruction: the younger the participant, the easier the lesson. Youth (read: digital natives) need very little instruction in this regard beyond basic navigation around the program, file management and system settings, and troubleshooting when problems arise. The youth I have worked with prefer being left alone to build their stories in their own way and at their own pace. Those who have not grown up with computers tend to become overwhelmed by the technology and generally need, and want, extra help. This is by no means an absolute, as familiarity with computers is very much based on previous access to the technology, which is not always the case with participants of any age. In my experience, only four of the 26 storytellers in this study were uncomfortable using Mac computers and one of these four was because he was a “PC guy.” Adults with varying disabilities are surprisingly tech savvy, having found digital technology to be of great service to them and, more often than not, need very little help with computers. In fact, in one workshop, one of the participants actually taught her assistant tricks on how to set up the desktop for someone who was legally blind, but could see if things were magnified large enough. This give and take and blurred lines between instructor and student are very much encouraged in the workshop setting.

Most people do not have photographs of crises, so storytellers are encouraged to visualize their stories through other means. As the construction of the digital stories progresses, storytellers are introduced to Creative Commons, wikis, and portals for music, sound effects, Library of Congress artwork, photos, abstract images, video, and other visual means to tell their story using the hundreds and thousands of copyright-free options available. This phase of the workshop is a highly creative one, where the buzz of energy circles the room. It's also the longest phase and does not end until all the stories are complete and the lead instructor does a go-around, checking each story for any glitches or small elements that might need tweaking. Surprisingly, even after hours of focused attention, storytellers—of all ages—are reluctant to take breaks or leave at the end of the day, so passionate they become about their multimedia stories. By the last day, participants are generally spent but excited and are looking forward to the screening, which is the culmination of the workshop process.

### **The Screening and Closing Circle**

After all the stories have been exported into .mov files, they are burned to DVDs and given to each storyteller (generally they receive two DVDs). Friends and family members sometimes attend this showing but, more often, just the storytellers and assistants are present. At the Phoenix Program, some participants request that their Parole Officer or Therapist attend the screening and, at one, a teen asked that a family member attend. This is left up to each group, although more often than not, only the participants and volunteers in the workshop are present. Although many of the stories told are painful and heartbreaking, a sense of excitement at having finished their projects

infuses the room. Popcorn is made and the room is transformed into a “movie theatre” where all workshop participants, both storytellers and assistants, will watch each other’s “movies.”

Each storyteller stands in the front and gives a brief introduction to their project. Sometimes this can be emotional. Sometimes it’s filled with laughter; for everyone it is an accomplishment and good feelings abound. Storytellers always have the option to not show their stories, but in my experience, this has never been the case. In the screenings at the Phoenix Program, as stated before, parole officers or treatment team members sometimes attend and I witnessed one therapist visibly shocked at the story that was told by their client because it was a story this particular teen had never spoken of in counseling meetings. This therapist later pushed for digital storytelling to become a regular component of the Phoenix Program treatment plan.<sup>62</sup>

This final screening is followed by a closing circle, where each participant talks about what the process has been like for them and what they learned; it is also the primary basis for the narrative analysis in this study.

### **The Workshop Data**

Based on the analysis of transcripts of audio recorded post-workshop interviews and group discussions, and written evaluations, this project focuses on the subjective experiences and perceptions of the storytellers and workshop volunteers, using the first-person narrative as a foundation. This narrative analysis was loosely guided by the postmodern bent in socio-cultural narrative analysis that has led to a focus on the

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<sup>62</sup> This push led to naught, unfortunately, as state and county funding has been cut by 25% for most art-based mental health treatment programs.

subjectivity of the person writing the autobiography or transmitting the narrative, and who has lived the actual experience, emphasizing the control of the story's telling (Grbich 2007). I have used this method as a means of understanding each storyteller's personal perception of their experience (Yow 2005) and have allowed for a greater level of reader interpretation of the narrative, minimizing my interpretation. This socio-cultural approach goes beyond analysis based on language structures, looking to the much broader interpretive frameworks people use to make sense of everyday experiences. Based on this model for socio-cultural narrative analysis, I have loosely identified the boundaries of the stories themselves, although this study is more interested in the second step of the process, which is how "people make sense of events" (ibid, 130) and which emotions and feelings are communicated or displayed. These have been categorized into major "Themes" and, although they may not do justice to the complexity of the text (Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach, et al 1998, 113), they do aid in the organization and interpretation of the narrative.

The study participant numbers break down as follows:

- 50 participants: 26 storytellers and 24 assistants
- Of 26 storytellers, 13 were Male and 13 were Female
- Of 24 assistants, 7 were Male and 17 were Female

My analysis organizes and interprets this data into two categories and then locates themes and ranks these themes according to frequency. Multiple answers were possible from one respondent if replies covered more than one theme, as I was looking for commonalities and major differences; these were then coded with each corresponding number. Some answers were left out of the figures listed below if they were single answers and not

given by anyone else. I highlight here the most common answers, with the 5 highest-ranking themes in the two categories of Storytellers and Adult Assistants.

## CHAPTER V

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, based on the narratives of the participants themselves, I have organized the participants' responses according to each category. I begin with the category of Storyteller, followed by the Assistant category. As stated above, I analyze the top five ranking responses (called "Themes"). I support the most common themes using a selection of responses that most accurately represent the theme they support. I summarize these findings and discuss their possible ramification in terms of digital storytelling workshops and what this experience means for those who participate in them. Below is a bar chart illustrating the basic data findings in the Storyteller category.

#### *Storyteller Primary Themes*

Figure 10 and Table 2 illustrate the basic findings in the Storyteller category. What do these numbers mean as an actual experience for those who engage in a digital storytelling workshop? First, I will present a selection of narratives by the individuals who participated in workshops, starting with answers that fall under the theme #1, "Sharing my story/expressing myself helps me and others" (21%), the most common response in the data. I will then follow these narratives with a discussion of each one and an analysis based on interpretation. I also include a discussion on the "negative" responses at the end of the Storyteller category. This is then repeated in the Assistant category.

**Table 2. Primary Themes: Storyteller**

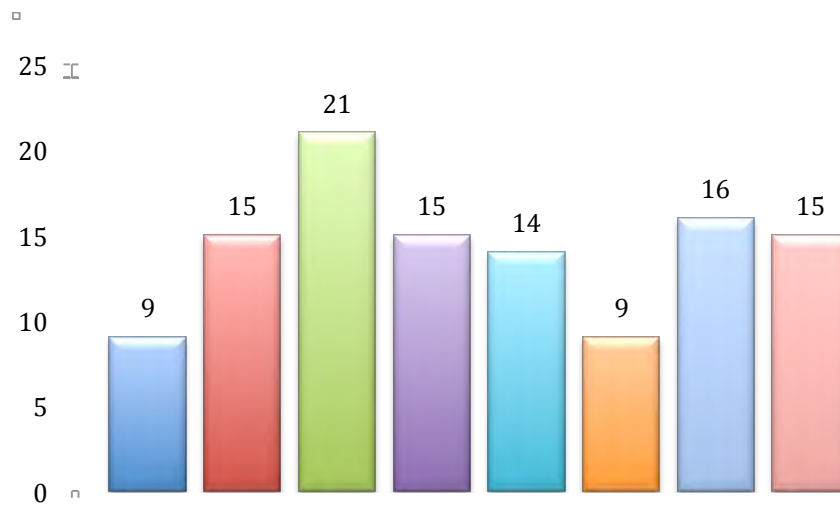


Figure 10. Storyteller Primary Themes. Bars from left to right indicate themes by number (See Table 2 for theme numbers). The percentage of participants whose answer fell into each theme is shown above the bars.

**Table 2. Primary Themes: Storytellers**

1. Sharing my story/expressing myself helps me and others (21%)
2. Learned a new way of coping/viewing self, other, or event (16%)
3. Helped me to get over painful experience/feelings (15%)
4. Felt a release/freedom telling a story never talked about before (15%)
5. Enjoyed freedom of expression (15%)
6. Group pride/pride in another storyteller/pride in self 14%
7. Learned computer skills/editing software (9%)
8. General appreciation at having been listened to (9%)

Total Participants: 26 (13 Male/13 Female)

Total responses: 114



**Theme 1: “Sharing my story/expressing myself helps me and others”**

“...you know it’s one thing to just write a story and then speak it and then make a movie about it but the way I felt about it was that it expressed us all in individual ways and I thought that was really cool and it helped everyone understand each other more and built a stronger relationship between us all...”

“It helped me to talk about some of the trauma in my life.”

...I talked about something that...not many people know... and it gave me the chance to get that out...I just felt like it was really a time for me to be honest with myself as well...”

“...I also like how some of the things that have happened and then looking at the past and then the present that made me realize why I do some of the things I do and why I react in certain ways to certain things or even, you know, just how I am now...like the way I act, the way I dress, the way I talk to people...”

“...it helped me get my story out there for others to hear.”

“I really appreciated the fact that I could express myself in ways...just writing my story and just opening up and not holding back any emotions, like I got to express something that I’ve never really known about myself until now and just knowing that I’ve opened up about that...reading my story and hearing my story and watching my movie...it just opened my heart to make more room for me to love someone else. Just like every time I play it now I know it’s going to end up opening me up a little bit more.”

“...sharing my story helps others.”

Number 2: “Learned a new way of coping/viewing self, other, or event” (16%) was the second most common response.

**Theme 2: “Learned a new way of coping/viewing self, other, or event”**

“I’ve been thinking about my mom a lot and how...it was different, you know I always thought it was because of the drugs and alcohol that, you know, that’s the reason she did what she did, and she had a choice...but hearing the other people’s stories about, like, the drugs in their life...it gave me an open view of like why she would have done that. And I don’t have all that information so I shouldn’t just...it’s like I’m judging her, judging a book by its cover. So, that’s pretty much what I was doing with

my mom because I really don't know why she did what she did. And that's not ok for me to do if I don't like them doing it then I shouldn't do it either.”

“...I also learned how to use empathy, putting myself into someone else's position. Watching their stories helped me to use empathy and when I had gave feedback it wasn't like “this thing sucks” it was more helpful feedback...and I learned to use patience, too.”

“I feel like I know how to say things better.”

“...I really don't like to remember how I used to cut my wrists, you know, harm my body in that way or anything when that happened to me in the past, but digital storytelling kind of helped me realize, “hey, it's ok” you know, it makes my personality because of what happened. Now, it's like, “I'm here!” you know and I like that.”

Theme #3 “Helped me to get over painful experience/feelings” (15%), #4 “Felt a release/freedom telling a story never talked about before” (15%), and #5 “Enjoyed freedom of expression” (15%) all tied for third most common responses. These are presented individually, beginning with theme #3.

**Theme 3: “Helped me to get over painful experience/feelings.”**

“I thought I’d never be able to heal from that and become who I used to be and having the support I have now...”

“I’ve just learned that I have a lot of healing process to do and this was a really big major one and I would have never realized that if hadn’t been for the digital story...”

“I realized my inner pain.”

“I don’t really talk to people much and being able to talk to a computer...it doesn’t talk back so it’s a lot easier...and...I just feel like I can talk about it more now.”

“My healing process has been long and painful, but rewarding. It [creating a digital story] has helped me to overcome my triggers.”

“It shows me not to be afraid of my past.”

**Theme 4: “Felt a release/freedom telling a story never talked about before.”**

“...I think it helped me personally by getting off the tensions I had built up for so long inside me and could just speak it and everyone was not judgmental...”

“...you know, I’m not afraid to be myself no more, ‘cause I used to kind of hold back and not really do anything.”

“It [the digital story] expressed myself and made me feel good about being able to share my experience.”

“I felt an internal release.”

**Theme 5: “Enjoyed freedom of expression.”**

“It was an opportunity to, like, open up...and like I learned something about myself in the meantime that I didn’t know and...it was...it was fun. It wasn’t like a “sit-down therapy session and learn what you’re really feeling” (said in lower, authoritarian voice), it was like a way of *expressing* how you feel the same way as, like, explaining it to yourself, you know? So...I liked that a lot.”

“...everyone was appreciative of our stories and they didn’t say, like, ‘oh, you can’t do this cause it has profanity in it or you can’t do that cause it’s around drug use’ and stuff...and everyone was just open to hearing it.”

“...you guys let us express ourselves in the way that we wanted to be expressed...”

“I liked that, like when we were making our movies we didn’t have to, like, keep it ‘PG.’ We were able to have it be the way we wanted it to be...and, like, use the pictures that we wanted and...um...and the music how we wanted it.”

“I think it was pretty cool we got to everything pretty much by ourselves, like once we learned the basics, we were just kind of left alone. If we asked for help we got it, but if we wanted to do it ourselves we had the opportunity to learn our own way and make it our own way and have our own sound effects and make it different and stand out.”

In answer to “what you liked best” about the workshop, one individual wrote:

“That I could make it about anything...”

Another wrote:

“I’ve never been able to express myself before.”

And another:

“Getting to express myself the way I want to.”

The fourth most common response was Theme #6 “Group pride/pride in another storyteller/pride in self” (14%).

**Theme 6: “Group pride/pride in another storyteller/pride in self.”**

“...you know it’s one thing to just write a story and then speak it and then make a movie about it but the way I felt about it was that it expressed us all in individual ways and I thought that was really cool and it helped everyone understand each other more and built a stronger relationship between us all...”

“I noticed a change in *XXX*! He pulled himself together and he’s never done it before.”

“I like how everybody used it for something deep and something meaningful. And I felt like that brought everybody, like it brought us peers closer together in a way ‘cause we know certain things now...”

“I think I’m most proud of *XXX* because he doesn’t get his work done at school and he’s usually the slow person and this time, he was almost the fastest person and I think he did really good.”

“It’s nice that people like you go out of your way to better other people’s lives. It’s nice to have people like that in our community.”

“...the thing that I liked was...being with everybody and worked as a team, got along...that was the first thing that I seen *XXX* cry and...that’s a good thing, she needs a good cry.”

Fifth most common response was a tie between #7, “Learned computer skills/editing software” (9%) and #8, “General appreciation at having been listened to” (9%).

**Theme 7: “Learned computer skills/editing software.”**

“What was especially helpful for me was learning how to do the...umm...Final Cut Express. I’ve noticed that I’ve gotten better at computers and got better at learning how to do more stuff.”



“Learning the new program itself was cool—now I know how to use it and I’m probably going to end up making more stories!”

“I’ve enjoyed this time because I’ve learned a Mac computer and I’m glad that everybody helped me with this...”

**Theme 8: “General appreciation at having been listened to.”**

“Well, I thought I couldn’t tell a story, but when I thought it over, the story just come.”

“...it makes my heart happy that people have done this with my life. And I really appreciate the time and effort that you guys have done for me.”

“I like to learn how to, uh, do something like that...that we can never get to do, like professional makers do. This is a learning place.”

“It was really neat to have people...umm...I could listen to their stories...I like it when people come together...and it feels good to have people together...I never had that experience before. And I got to experience it myself.”

## **Negative Responses/Change Needed Storytellers**

On the written evaluations, participants had the opportunity to communicate negative or less-than-positive feelings about the workshop with the question: “What improvements or changes would you like to see us make to our workshops in the future.” Not everyone responded but of 30 responses:

- **20** were a variation on “no changed needed” (66%)
- **2** thought the second day (in a 3-day workshop) was too long (7%)
- **2** wanted more added to the workshop, such as allowance for longer stories, video cameras, and device (such as video camera) tutorials (7%)
- **1** thought the workshop was too short (3%)
- **1** thought more people needed to know about digital storytelling (3%)

One answer was in direct opposition to the DS ethos, that the storyteller is in complete control of their story and has final say over how it is told:

“Not to change anything when someone has it set the way they want.”

## ***Discussion of Storyteller Results***

### **Theme 1: “Sharing my story/expressing myself helps me and others”**

In theme #1, an inner reflection is happening, one very much connected to the people around them and the relationships in their lives, something many of the participants have struggled with. Feelings of self-help or increased confidence in life

situations seem to be enhanced when they have connection with or are in relation to others as well. Moreover, one senses a surprise in this awareness and perhaps this revelation is an element of the change they perceive in themselves. A sense of having gained an opportunity to look at painful events or to express emotions long held within can also be found in this theme; it is intimately tied to sharing or the witnessing experience of sharing a previously-hidden story.

**Theme 2: “Learned a new way of coping/viewing self, other, or event”**

I infer from the responses in theme #2 a heightened sense of self-efficacy. Rather than the workshop experience merely allowing for insight, it allows for the consideration of an altered, or new, way of dealing with a heretofore-difficult experience or situation. Theme #2 is an external experience, as these responses are more about the individual in the world and in their ability to cope with issues and actions that have hurt them in the past than about reflection and internal processing, such as theme #3 (although it, too, is connected to others, just not to the same degree or bent). Through the data collected, I perceive a renewed strength in the storytellers as a result of the process of *looking* at their stories and the deep process of finding a way to visualize words and feelings rather than just saying them, as a possible reason so many of the respondents report breakthroughs in former perceptions of people and events. It is clearly also connected to the Story Circle, where one hears others’ stories and experiences and within that shared storytelling, individuals seem to realize they are not “alone” in their trials and challenges.

### **Theme 3: “Helped me to get over painful experience/feelings.”**

In theme #3, participants reported that telling one’s story aided their ability to overcome previous pain or negative experiences. Moreover, the word “realization” or “to realize” is very much connected to this process of telling a personal story. There is also an element of autobiography in this theme, or an autoethnography, as aspects of the self are revealed to them through deep observation and interpretation. I presume this is connected to the multimedia production process, as they do not state, “writing a story” or merely “telling a story,” but rather they specify “digital story.” Perhaps it is merely the time spent in quiet dialogue with oneself with the intention of telling a personal story to another that affords one the space to break things down into manageable moments.

### **Theme 4: “Felt a release/freedom telling a story never talked about before.”**

The notion of a “release” (of tension, of pain, of *something*) in theme #4 after having created a digital story is intimately tied to Dolby-Stahl’s concept that expression is an individual’s most “fundamental yet difficult task,” and that within that moment of expression we reconnect ourselves with our culture and, as well, with others (see page 68 of this manuscript for a more detailed discussion of this idea). Although out of the scope of this particular study, I would venture to say that most forms of artistic expression afford a sense of freedom, particularly in youth in lock-down or adults with disabilities who have not been offered many forms of creative personal expression.

### **Theme 5: “Enjoyed freedom of expression.”**

As in theme #4 above and according to the data, in theme #5 experience of pleasure at having been given the chance to express oneself or having never had the chance to do so before the workshop experience seems to be a defining aspect of the digital storytelling experience. In the case of theme #5, it seems to be more directly connected to the youth who participate in the workshops, rather than the adults, as all responses for theme #5 came from youth participants (15). Many of these youth were in lock-down where every aspect of their lives was monitored and dictated, so on some level this enjoyment of uncontrolled expression is not surprising. However, it is worth noting that none of the adults stated this as an element that was particularly important to them. As in one of the quotes for this theme, for some of the youth, a clear connection between creating a digital story and its therapeutic potential are found (*“It wasn’t like a “sit-down therapy session and learn what you’re really feeling” (said in lower, authoritarian voice), it was like a way of expressing how you feel the same way as, like, explaining it to yourself, you know?”*). For these youth, freedom to express themselves the way they want is doled out in brief and limited ways. Many of the youth in these workshops are the victims of abuse and neglect and I have overheard comments about not being able to express their deeper feelings—whether that is a by-product of their own drug or alcohol abuse or an arrested development due to a combination of factors (physical and sexual abuse, addiction, neglect). With a minimal amount of attention and guidance, these teens were able to access some of these deeper feelings using this art-based process. Learning to visualize a story of crisis—or any personal experience where no images exist—takes a deep reflection and inner processing of the emotional experience. Sometimes it is the

music that captures the feeling for them and being allowed to choose whatever music they want (with full attribution when using copyrighted music) seems to also aid in the telling. This freedom of expression, free from judgment, seemed to give them the space to look at painful events and come to understand not only their part in them, but seemed to also free them.

Later in this analysis, I look at “things the assistants would change if they could,” I will return to this theme as I see an interesting juxtaposition between youth desiring and enjoying freedom of expression and adult assistants who desire more control over the youth’s behavior.

**Theme 6: “Group pride/pride in another storyteller/pride in self.”**

This particular theme (#6) communicates quite nicely a sense of community within the digital storytelling workshop environment. Enjoyment and pride in the actions of others are positive and social behaviors; this is something that an individual might carry out into their interactions outside the workshop. In any event, it communicates a heightened sense of camaraderie within the peer group and personal confidence that would allow an individual to feel free enough to take pride in another’s work.

**Theme 7: “Learned computer skills/editing software.”**

With the exception of two responses from adult storytellers, theme #7 was most specifically a youth response, who seemed to appreciate and value this experience more than the adults, or at least was a more immediate appreciation. Youth also tend not to struggle with this aspect of digital story construction and navigate new software deftly.

The biggest obstacle seems to be the Mac vs. PC platforms challenge (“*PCs not Macs!! Not Macs! (both laugh)...It’s kind of like a trap, a mind control thing...(both laugh)...Macs are set to mind control...(laughs)*”), but otherwise the “digital natives” are happy with any chance they get to be on a computer. In the case of the adults with disabilities, at times the assistant worked as the hands and eyes of the storyteller, especially with certain disabilities that don’t allow for typing on a keyboard or similar fine motor coordination. Considering this, it’s no wonder many of the adults did not list this as a facet that stood out as important.

**Theme 8: “General appreciation at having been listened to.”**

Interestingly, and in comparison to the youth preference for “freedom of expression,” all comments in theme #8 come from the adult storytellers. Although it is uncertain, at least from what is available from the data, why youth more strongly value the freedom of expression, many of the adults valued the opportunity of being heard by others more. I have pondered this difference a fair amount in the attempt to understand its meaning. All the adult storytellers were adults with various disabilities, some more severe than others. As one participant stated in a conversation, “*people don’t even look me in the eye, let alone listen to me.*” I realize it is problematic comparing the responses of adults with disabilities to youth in voluntary lockdown. However, the youth may not have been challenged by physical disabilities, but they suffered abuse either inflicted by another or on themselves through various methods, which had rendered them “disabled” in some capacity. How much age played a role in the difference in responses I cannot be sure, but many of the tales I heard during the workshops were told by intelligent, deep-

thinking people who had experienced neglect and abuse. Strangely similar stories of lovers, families, and partners torn apart by a system that supposedly has their best interest in mind, but which is, nonetheless, paternalistic and does not seem to listen to these individuals because they might not speak in a way that is easily understood. Granted, for the adults, some are unable to get by without assistance, but it is more like their bodies are shells housing vibrant beings who think and feel like “able-bodied” individuals. I think it fair to say that this “general appreciation” at being heard did not surprise me, as this phrase was said over and over again during the workshops by adults. It does, however, surprise me that the youth did not list this as a theme.

#### ***Negative Responses/Change Needed: Storytellers***

In terms of responses regarding desired changes or improvements, overwhelmingly the storytellers felt that no change in the DS process or workshop was needed (66%). If we look at the one negative comment from a storyteller (“*Not to change anything when someone has it set the way they want*”), I can’t help but wonder if others felt this way. Since the CDS framework promotes a “leave no fingerprint” (see page 37 for more discussion on this) ethos, and the Trauma Healing Project also attempts to practice this, it is of concern that any participant felt this way. Although there is no way of knowing which storyteller experienced this, it is important to recognize that it occurs and that it is antithetical to empowerment. This same respondent also stated “*it was fun and a good way to express myself*,” which leads me to believe the overall experience of participating in a digital storytelling workshop and creating a digital story was a positive one. We also don’t know whether this person was referencing the



storytelling itself or was referring to a production element, such as text or transitions. In any event, something in the experience was negative enough for them to confide this in the anonymous format of the written evaluation, so it is important enough to include here as part of this discussion. It is also important to recognize that only one of 26 storytellers apparently experienced this feeling that their story had been controlled in some way and that, overwhelmingly, participants felt free and supported.

Two storytellers also wished for more allowance in the workshops, such as longer stories, tutorials, and the use of digital devices such as video cameras. This dissatisfaction addresses a limitation in the CDS format: by limiting the length of a story, the storyteller must conform to a fairly rigid expression of a story that might be served by more freedom. As quoted in chapter I, the framework employed by the Trauma Healing Project (the CDS-created one), gives it its “elegance” (Meadows 2008), but it might also corral thoughts and experiences into a “manageable,” and potentially limited, telling. The time limit for a workshop might also be compromising the stories themselves. One individual stated in an interview, “...*a lot of people know I really don’t like my mom...I mean I love her but I don’t necessarily have to like her....so I don’t necessarily feel like I expressed a lot about that, but I feel like there’s a lot of people like that. I think it would have been more of my story if I had used something more deeper...*”. This pressure to “produce,” in a structured and limited time-frame, forces some individuals tell a story—any story they can think of at the time—and might not allow for deeper reflection. More preparation by staff would aid this challenge immensely.

In most of the workshops that I have been a part of many of the assistants have the hearts and minds for adequate and tender support, but technology is a struggle for

them. Personally I found this frustrating at times, but finding tech-savvy volunteers is difficult at best. Those who have assisted possessing these skills have usually been university students who have full workloads at school, as well as part-time jobs, and finding the time required is not always an option. In any event, finding ways to incorporate more technology tutorials and freeing up the story framework limitations is something to consider.

One storyteller mentioned in an interview (see Appendix B for full transcript) that she noticed her peers seemed to retreat back into a shell once they had returned to their “pods”<sup>63</sup> at the end of each day’s workshop: *“They talked about it [regarding changes during the workshop] a lot during the workshop but when we came back here they kind of just put that back in and they didn’t let it show like they did before. I know I did that too but I also talked to the staff...I don’t know if they did cause I’m not them...and...it’s like they’re hiding in a shell again. But they’re aware of it, of what they’re doing and stuff, like their feelings and stuff, they just don’t know how else to deal with it besides just having made a video of it.”* This addresses an important challenge, particularly when attempting to integrate the digital storytelling process into a therapeutic model. If no support exists for the individuals to process the thoughts and feelings that come up during a workshop, what then do they do with them? Yes, they might have a DVD to potentially process their experience with others (and themselves), but what then? In the immediate aftermath of the deep emotional processing that can be a part of a workshop experience, especially for youth with compromised coping skills, what do they do with it? Returning to the “pod” environment is not the warmest of places and the staff who control and manage their every action have no idea what has transpired for them, they therefore

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<sup>63</sup> “Pods” are the rooms where youth in lockdown live during their stay at the Phoenix Program.

cannot appreciate the fragility of the individuals when they return. It seems to me a potentially painful re-entry. Better preparation by staff and therapists would curtail this, but as written before, finding the time and resources is a monumental challenge for agencies, therapists, and staff already heavily overloaded.

Although the storytellers overwhelmingly stated that the DST workshop experience was positive, my experience as a facilitator infuses some insight into the workshops that was not communicated in the data. In both the adults and the youth storytellers, I have witnessed anger and frustration over the editing process, as well as some interpersonal strife. Why these things were not mentioned in the data that was available for me to analyze, might have more to do with the euphoria at having finished an intense and deeply moving process that immediately follows story completion than with genuine satisfaction. Perhaps those things just lose their power once the process is complete. Follow-up interviews, as suggested in the next chapter, would shed light on this aspect of the workshops.

### ***Adult Assistant Primary Themes***

Figure 11 and Table 3 illustrate the basic findings in the Assistant category.

**Table 3 Primary Themes: Adult Assistants**

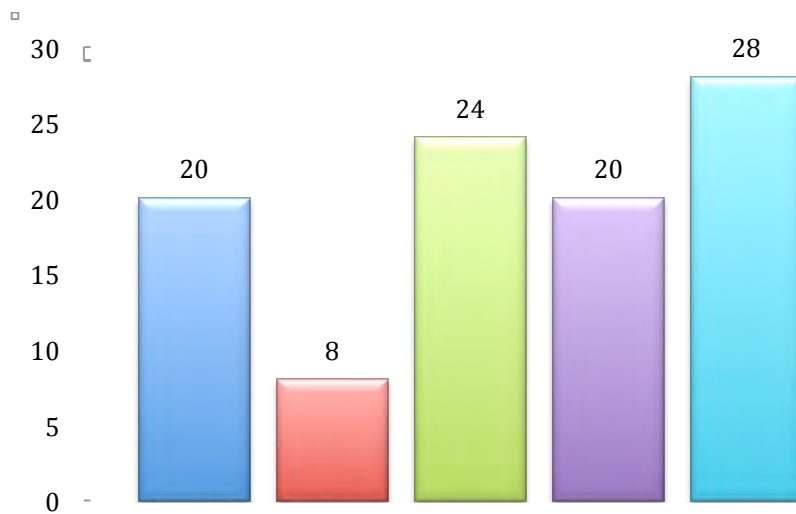


Figure 11. Adult Assistant Primary Themes. Bars from left to right indicate themes by number (See Table 3 for theme numbers). The percentage of participants whose answer fell into each theme is shown above the bars.

**Table 3. Primary Themes: Adult Assistants**

1. Enjoyment in helping others express themselves (28%)
2. Honored to share in the process/Appreciation (24%)
3. Surprise/pleasure everyone learns editing program/computers quickly (20%)
4. Learned something new about self (20%)
5. Pleased that storytellers trust strangers (8%)

Total Assistants: 24 (7 Male/17 Female)

Total Responses: 71

The most common response in the adults was Theme #1, “Enjoyment in helping others express themselves” (28%).

**Theme 1: “Enjoyment in helping others express themselves.”**

“...it’s like watching the slow-motion of a rose opening up...just discovering the beauty on the inside. And what’s really nice is knowing that you are each a survivor and you have learned that you are a survivor through these videos at this phase in your life, while you’re still young, and you didn’t have to wait until like me...I got to be 60-something to learn that I was a survivor, so I really appreciate, you know, being a part of that.”

“I just like the whole process of you guys getting to do your own thing. It is, like *XXX* said, you’re kind of just set free and you get to be who you are and create how you want to create and I think that’s really important.”

“...I also really noticed people...not just coming more to life and engaging more in the activity but also I really, really appreciated the way you all cared for each other. It was really dear to watch the way...even when things got frustrating and hard for different ones of you the rest of you just made space and you were respectful and gentle with each other

and respectful of the stories, too, and that's...um...that's a big gift that you have given each other and I appreciate being a little part of."

"...it's just so exciting for me to see it all come together...and it's not just coming together from the story aspect but the energy that builds...it's just a pleasure to be part of that."

"...you all sort of put your hearts out there and...uh...that's a brave thing and you all stuck to your ideas about what you wanted and where and, and, I just feel honored and blessed."

The second most common response in the assistants was Theme #2 "Honored to share in the process/Appreciation" (24%).

**Theme 2: "Honored to share in the process/Appreciation."**

"I appreciated that everybody took it seriously. It's serious subject matters for each of you and I think you can be silly with it, you can play it off as not really important, but you all took yourselves seriously and took the project seriously and it reaffirmed my faith in each one of you."

"I just feel honored to have been here."

“I just feel really honored that all of you have opened up and told these stories about your life. You know, we’ve only known each other for five days and it’s just amazing to me that in that five day time ya’ll have told really intimate, touching stories and...that means a lot to me. And I thank you all.”

“I’m always apprehensive not knowing what’s going to happen as far as where...where’s the energy going to come from and it comes from...it just happens. And I just really appreciate getting a chance to meet other people, human to human.”

“I appreciated how everybody worked on their stories and I want to thank people for letting me come hang out and observe and I think that it will, in the work that I do in making videos and stuff like that I think having seen and heard what you do will have an effect on how I do my own work, so, thank you for that.”

“Blessed and deeply moved.”

“It always breaks my heart to hear the backgrounds these youth come from. I can’t imagine going through what they have and come out strong in the end.”



Themes #3 “Surprise/pleasure that everyone learns editing program/computers quickly” and #4 “Learned something new about self” tied in response rate for third most common response in the assistants (20%).

**Theme 3: “Surprise/pleasure that everyone learns editing program/computers quickly.”**

“I liked watching how quickly you all picked this stuff up! XXX shows you 5 seconds of computer stuff and you’re on it! And you’ve got it down and I’m always very impressed by that...”

“I think it’s amazing that you can come in here with an outline for a story and 2.5 days later you can come away with completed stories.”

“I’m most proud of all you young folks come in here and just jumping right in and just doing it so quickly—I’m just really proud of you guys, you know.”

“I am very proud of all of you guys creating your stories and in record time and they’re awesome stories and the recordings were really great.”

“I really liked how quickly these came together, you know, we’re having a little technical difficulties this afternoon, but as far as the editing and

learning the software and...I mean...you guys are just so fast! And they're all beautiful stories.”

**Theme #4: “Learned something new about self.”**

“Each time I am involved with a workshop I learn more.”

“Personally I was impacted by some of the negative feelings participants had of themselves and glad to witness the growth in such a short time.”

“I laughed, I cried. It was an eye-opening experience listening to the stories.”

“I learned and grew as I heard other stories.”

“...what I learned was how to make new friends and how to be patient and understanding of other people’s needs.”

“I just want to say that seeing all the participants building their stories and having built a story myself I know the frustrations and obstacles...just seeing other people go through the process and being part of that helped me...”

Theme #5 “Pleased that storytellers trust strangers” (8%) is the fourth most common response and the fifth major theme in the assistant category.

**Theme 5: “Pleased that storytellers trust strangers.”**

“I really, really appreciate is each of the participants’ willingness to tell their stories, each of the storytellers to be able to come in here and tell them and be patient enough to go through the process—I really appreciate that.”

“...I’m really pleased that the adult partners were really able to get in there and help you all kind of make get better and better and that you were all willing to accept the feedback. That’s really phenomenal...you’ve also been strong where you’ve wanted to be strong. It’s like I felt like I could tell you whatever I thought without worrying that you would do it just cause I said so. So if you felt strongly that it needed to be said “this” way, you didn’t change it, which meant I could give you feedback without worrying about you...”

“I have to say I heard a lot about trust with a lot of different people in here and I’ve been most impressed with how everybody’s been able to trust everybody else. That’s really huge to have that trust that quickly and to maintain it. I think that’s really powerful. So along with what everybody

else said, I think trust is one of the foundations, one of the keys to building relationships. So, I'm glad you were all here and I'm glad you all stayed."

"...even though you came in with your minds closed and one of you didn't want to come and do it, but you were willing to open up and look and see and give it a try and you liked it and I think that's amazing."

"I think the thing that means the most to me is that I come in here and you guys don't know me at all and yet, you open yourselves up and you tell these really...you know...amazing stories of lives you've overcome...and you are open enough...even with so many things that have happened, you're so open and you tell these stories and you trust us enough to feel like you can communicate that. And that means a lot to me..."

For the assistants, responses for negative or less-than-positive feelings about the workshop through the question: "What improvements or changes would you like to see us make to our workshops in the future" were as follows:

Not everyone responded but of 15 responses:

- 6 were a variation on "make no changes" (40%)
- 3 wished for more prep and training for assistants (20%)
- 2 requested minor logistical changes in the schedule (13%)

Two had the following criticisms:

- “With youth this young, more structured activities maybe to help keep them on track”
- “When doing group agreements, to include “proper language” (as a way to highlight the issue of respect, especially self-respect)”

### ***Discussion of Adult Assistant Results***

#### **Theme 1: “Enjoyment in helping others express themselves.”**

Theme #1 is best expressed in the following quote: “...it’s just so exciting for me to see it all come together...and it’s not just coming together from the story aspect but the energy that builds...it’s just a pleasure to be part of that.” This general enjoyment of watching other express and create is the most common experience for those who assist others in creating a digital story. It is a general, pleasurable experience and very closely linked to theme #3 below. The population that THP works with and the subsequent stories many of their participants create, allows for a broad acceptance for any story, as these stories are often the first time they are being told. Creating space for that to happen is rare and it is my belief that most assistants are aware of this unusual situation. Moreover, many of the assistants who volunteer with THP are themselves survivors who have decided to pay their healing forward by helping others. It is likely that through this process they continue to heal themselves from past trauma by helping others.

#### **Theme 2: “Honored to share in the process/Appreciation.”**

The second most common response is, to my mind, experientially related to theme #1 above, with the key difference that where responses are more external and observational in #1, in theme #2 the responses are more personal. This theme has a spiritual element to it, as words like “*blessed*,” and terms such as “*deeply moved*,” or “*honored to be here*” hint at feelings that are not in the day-to-day experiences of most people. As I stated above in theme #1, many assistants are themselves survivors of trauma and this heightened state of self-expression and personal validation has a ripple effect on those involved. Some of the assistants are employees of the various agencies involved and find the DS process to be a doorway into the experiences those they work with (for example, “*It always breaks my heart to hear the backgrounds these youth come from. I can’t imagine going through what they have and come out strong in the end*”). This is particularly true for those who work with the youth. For the Phoenix Program workshops, which always include at least two assistants employed by the Department of Youth Services, it seems to me the restrictive environment the assistants work in can hamper real expression. These workshops allow for an easing of those rigid walls between youth and adults but the DYS employees are always aware of the restrictions and act accordingly. Even when one considers this, according to the data, the DST workshop environment nonetheless has a profound effect on the adults, as much as it does the youth creating the stories.

**Theme 3: “Surprise/pleasure that everyone learns editing program/computers quickly.”**

I find the data in theme #3 to be indicative of what has, in the past, been called “the generation gap,” as most assistants are much older than many of the storytellers (obviously this is particularly true in regards to the youth, but also plays out with some of the adults with disabilities, as many of them rely on computers as a manageable way to stay connected to the world at large). Some of the surprise might come from a perceived “chaos” in the first day of the workshop, where very often participants do not have their stories written and they aren’t sure which story they want to tell (this is more often true with the youth). Perhaps this is just an aspect of the DS experience, this sense of magic that people can actually complete a multimedia story in a short period of time. For example, one assistant stated: *“I think it’s amazing that you can come in here with an outline for a story and 2.5 days later you can come away with completed stories.”* The desire to finish and walk away from the workshop with DVDs of their “movies” seems to have its own energy and propels storytellers to complete their stories in the allotted time. Most stories run anywhere from two and half minutes to four, although this is a guideline. As stated before, the only real parameter is a word count of 350 words, which usually ends up creating a 3-minute story.

#### **Theme 4: “Learned something new about self.”**

According to the data, there is an element of wonder in this theme, as the quotes from assistants, upon reflection, all tend to voice surprise at having learned something about themselves while placing very little focus on themselves. I will venture the thought that bearing witness to someone else’s pain, openly and shared in trust, is a personally transformative event, much like Landsberg has posited in her notion of a “prosthetic

memory” (see page 60 of this manuscript for more on this discussion). I think it bears repeating: if a person has the opportunity to experience another’s historical narrative, they can actually take on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. This resulting “prosthetic” memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and political view. Theme #4 seems to support this idea.

**Theme 5: “Pleased that storytellers trust strangers.”**

I believe it is often surprising that complete strangers are willing to open up and trust others enough to share an intimate and often excruciating story. This seems to be as much a revelation for the storytellers as it is the assistants and is perhaps the reason DST workshop environment can be so transformative for individuals. Speaking about oneself, in many contexts, is something we’re taught early on to avoid. This is especially true when stories of rape or forms of trauma are involved, which is why there exists such an enduring silence around experiences such as sexual abuse. Trust is that which has been betrayed in many of the stories told in the Trauma Healing Project’s workshops and this makes the ready willingness to trust strangers all the more formidable. Creating a space where this is possible is a challenge in the best of circumstances, but is all the more surprising that this can be accomplished in such a brief amount of time. I would venture to say that any experience of trust feeds itself and grows exponentially, rhizome-like.

***Negative Responses/Change Needed: Assistants***

The data looking at “needed changes or suggestions for improvements” for the assistant category communicates a similar enjoyment of the workshop experience, with



40% of respondents stating that “no change” was needed. 20% thought there should be more pre-workshop training for the assistants, related primarily to technical training, such as knowledge of the software-editing program. I would like to look more deeply at the two negative responses that both communicate a discomfort with the relaxed nature of the workshop environments with youth:

- “With youth this young, more structured activities maybe to help keep them on track”
- “When doing group agreements, to include ‘proper language’ (as a way to highlight the issue of respect, especially self-respect)”

While the essence of these comments is, I’m sure, the desire to guide and teach, I find their juxtaposition with the youth’s responses, where they stated that they valued the freedom to create their stories the way they wanted, interesting (“*when we were making our movies we didn’t have to, like, keep it ‘PG.’ We were able to have it be the way we wanted it to be...and, like, use the pictures that we wanted...and the music how we wanted it*”). In my experience facilitating workshops, the “chaos” that can be found when working with youth is a component of the creative process, one that frees them to move and feel in ways that perhaps allow for the intensity of their candor. Although breaks (with physical activities such as basketball) are built into any workshop with youth, in my experience they sometimes need to be coerced into these breaks, as the focus with which they approach their storytelling is remarkable. These comments do communicate a need for better preparation for the assistants, in both technological trainings as well as a preparedness that covers youth behavior in the workshops.

Not everyone is cut out to work with teens or early adolescents. In fact, some THP volunteers have said outright they prefer working with adults and do not assist at workshops where youth are the storytellers. A wildness exists within this population that can make some adults uncomfortable and I think these comments above speak to the anxiety that I have witnessed in certain individuals. The numbers support my experience that *most* assistants are at ease with teen energy; in all the workshops, only two respondents had an issue with the chaotic nature of the youth participants. Additionally, as two of the six workshops were held in an environment that regulated every move and action of the storytellers, it is not surprising to me that the free-form nature of the THP workshops could catch someone off guard. I also feel these responses are perhaps a deeper reflection on the adults' need for control, more than the workshops themselves.

### ***Summary***

My observational experience as a facilitator of digital storytelling workshops is supported by the data collected by the Trauma Healing Project. This includes, most specifically, feelings of good will and self-confidence after having completed a digital story in both the storytellers as well as the assistants. Engaging in a workshop also seems to re-wire certain responses to challenging events or situations through the creative process, something I did not expect to find. As many of these participants are youth, in particular youth who have received little if any positive reinforcement in their brief lives, the care and attention given them as part of the workshop environment might communicate the importance of focused positive attention as well as the power of

creative expression. Moreover, this data allows me to answer the research questions I presented at the start of this study:

*RQ#1: What is the personal experience for an individual who engages in a DST workshop?*

*RQ#2: Does creating a digital story lead to increased feelings of self-efficacy?*

*RQ#3: What is the personal experience for those who assist/volunteer at a digital storytelling workshop?*

*RQ#1: What is the personal experience for an individual who engages in a DST workshop?*

For the storytellers, the personal experience of participating in a digital storytelling workshop is overwhelmingly positive, with transformative insights being the most common experience. One senses that the process of creating a digital story, the experience of telling a personal story in a multimedia format, allows for deeper understanding of the event and one's interface and reactions to it. A sense of gratitude exists for the opportunity to approach this past experience in a creative way and retake a kind of control of its long-term effects. The workshop environment also seems to foster community and compassion for others, with direct application possible in one's life and with friends and family members. Increased feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence are felt directly after completing a digital storytelling workshop.

In regards to research question #2:

*Does creating a digital story lead to increased feelings of self-efficacy?*

I can comfortably answer that having the opportunity to tell a personal story in a multimedia format, and in the workshop environment, leads to increased feelings of self-efficacy and growth. Moreover, I now realize, this self-efficacy is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, and according to many of the responses, might actually lead to new behavior in the participants; it helped the respondents to consider new behaviors in any case. Although the data does not allow me to follow that line of thinking, individuals communicated that they would, indeed, engage in different behaviors in the future. Whether that belief would sustain itself—particularly when faced with similar experiences that led to loss of efficacy in the first place—is the basis of future study.

*RQ#3: What is the personal experience for those who assist/volunteer at a digital storytelling workshop?*

Much like the storytellers, assistants are positively affected by the digital storytelling workshop experience. Feelings of gratitude and “being honored” at sharing in the trust and intimacy afforded them by the storytellers, is clearly found in the data. Unexpected personal growth was experienced through assisting, as were greater insights into their own past experiences. With the exception of two cases where the assistants desired more control of the workshop environment, the volunteers were overwhelmingly appreciative of the opportunity to guide the storytellers and to share in their opening.

In this study I have taken the data collected by the Trauma Healing Project, based on audio-recorded interviews and closing circles, and written evaluations and organized this information into five major Themes, separated by two categories (storyteller and

assistant). These themes were based on the most-common responses from participants and ranked accordingly. This narrative analysis has produced an intimate portrait of the digital storytelling workshop experience, based on first-person narrative responses given at the end of six workshops.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

*“Emancipation has many paths, some with more ruckus than others, but the quiet meditation of monks has failed us. We surrendered silence and opened our mouths, saying whatever we wished under open air.”*

—Salvador Plascencia

#### ***Implications for Future Study***

Digital storytelling has become an umbrella term for any kind of storytelling that involves audio and visual communication blended into multimedia output; from vlogging (video blogs) to audio slideshows, from journalism classes that teach the skills for video production and editing to workshops based on the format created by the Center for Digital Storytelling. At the THP workshops, we guide participants in the latter, with the express intent of helping folks heal from traumatic events they have experienced, partnering with organizations who also work to assist individuals in becoming engaged and independent members of their community. This amalgamation of intent and educational production processes have created a unique environment, unlike any other in Lane County, Oregon.

For this project, I have been forced to limit my analysis to the narrowest of parameters of the experience. There has been no mention of the stories themselves, the

individuals engaging in the process, or their personal lives and personalities. This has been a direct result of institutional obstacles that tend to infantilize the populations featured in this project under the guise of protection. According to the protocol of my IRB, this study could analyze the post-workshop responses, as long as I did not mention the stories, the people, or anything about their experiences. Not that what is featured here is not important—it is very valuable—but I consider it a significant gap in this study that the reactions and post-workshop experiences cannot be presented in conjunction with the power of the stories themselves. This is a next stage in the analysis of the digital storytelling workshop experience. Additionally, creating connections between DST and autobiographical documentary will be strengthened by the addition of the multimedia stories themselves, although the outline for this possible future analysis can be found herein.

Many future paths are available from where this study ends. As stated above, a study that is prearranged to interview DST participants immediately after a workshop and then re-interview them 3 or 6 months later would lend great insight into staying power (or the lack thereof) of the transformational aspects of the experience. Data of this sort would lend itself to studies that look at democracy movements, public engagement, and the intersection of the two. A study which looks more deeply at the negative aspects of the experience might reveal important changes that need to be made, although based on this data, a study focused on that might take years to gather enough data to successfully produce information that could be used.

A study that focuses on issues of access to technology and workshops would be beneficial to in this particular study. Who can afford to attend workshops? Why is it

particularly difficult to secure funding for this type of process? And why does there seem to exist a resistance to employing this practice in therapeutic processes? These are some questions that might serve as the basis for research.

An analysis of the stories themselves is a natural path to follow, as is a comparative analysis of the stories and post-workshop responses. To more firmly plant DST in the genre of documentary, one would need to analyze the stories created themselves, which would, I believe situate digital storytelling as a sub-genre in the field of participatory media. As a sub-genre of documentary, digital storytelling—especially those stories created by trauma survivors—could align itself with Truth and Reconciliation committees and processes.

Two areas of study that could be taken up by scholars in psychology-related fields would be looking more closely at the therapeutic ramifications of the digital storytelling workshop experience. More specifically, trauma studies would benefit from the insights gained by the multimedia process, as well as the workshop experience itself. Those working in counseling and social work fields, both of which consider a more holistic view of mental health than say the field of psychiatry, could be well-served by studies that looked at DST as an art-based therapy; this process could easily be incorporated into treatment and counseling programs. At this point, however, at least in my experience, most treatment and counseling organizations are so incredibly strapped for cash that their hands are tied as far as incorporating new processes into existing programs. This would require additional support by staff already weighted down by heavy workloads. In any event, emerging scholars might want to consider bridging the old with the new, by creating counseling programs that use an art-therapy foundation and employ multimedia



technologies. Education Studies are on the vanguard in their use of digital storytelling and borrowing certain methods from Media Studies or Folklore would serve their, heretofore, heavy reliance on quantitative methodology. The first-person narrative would strengthen their studies, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the projects they engage in. As an aside, federal funding is heavily weighted toward Education studies and quantitative methods. Finding ways to incorporate qualitative and oral history methods into these studies might open doors of insight for future students and scholars.

In the fields of folklore and media studies, my particular fields of interest, revisiting the discussion of digital storytelling and its connection to documentary film at the start of this study, and with the caveat that no actual stories are mentioned, I nonetheless can reassert that these productions qualify as a new sub-genre of documentary. I think it important to revisit the fact that no stories have been presented in this study—something that seems a natural and necessary element of a study focused on digital storytelling. This is particularly true as the data support such powerful personal transformation. What have these individuals transformed from? What were their experiences? As I've stated before, the institutional barriers for my inclusion of these stories have been acute. Oral history collection is a tricky process as far as Human Subjects Approval is concerned. Neither ethnography nor strict analysis, it often defies IRB categorization, making it a shade of gray that heavily-quantitative processes just can't "see." Moreover, when working with youth and adults who have been subjugated by the system, it not only sends up additional red flags for those responsible for giving—or withholding—research approval, but it seems to trigger an almost knee-jerk response in them. They are teens, they're in the system, and we will further our marginalization of

them by a second (or third?) silencing under a pretext of protection. It is truly maddening. Is it any wonder students and scholars turn to journalistic pursuits in order to share important stories? One could say this is a method of maintaining the hierarchical status quo employing bureaucratic means or is it another way to keep the voices of these marginalized populations silenced? To be fair, I understand the history of the review board's existence. It was founded on a noble and important premise: scholars and researchers were exploiting underrepresented populations for their own gain and at the personal expense of the individuals being poked and prodded, both medically and psychologically. But, if I may be so bold, I strongly suggest that these review boards be required to include scholars who actually engage in oral history collection and ethnography. Review boards are overwhelmingly comprised of quantitative researchers who know almost nothing of what the process is or its methodological frame. Therefore, they insist on squeezing a fluid and moving process into categorical boxes that cannot hold it.

The format of a digital story is what makes a conversation about documentary possible in the first place. I would like to restate the definition of documentary, as is generally accepted as "the standard," by Renov and Nichols (see page 22 above): documentary aims to either 1) record, reveal, or preserve; 2) persuade or promote; 3) analyze or interrogate; or 4) to express (Renov); and following three of Nichols' models: the *historical* model, the *testimonial* model, and the *autobiographical* model, it is clear to me that this analysis supports digital storytelling's inclusion in the genre and succeeds in creating a framework from which to launch, in any event. An increase in academy-community collaborations, using participatory methods, should uncover a rich layer of

local history and give voice to those who have been under the radar for far too long. These stories are Lane County's history and relate the accounts of real people who have lived often-extraordinary experiences. They are spoken in their own voices and visually communicated in a way that makes sense for them, at an intersection of oral history and text-based literacies.

Digital storytelling is the epitome of Ong's *secondary orality*. Within the workshop experience, it allows for both subjective and objective ways of communication, it transcends barriers of time and place, but is also very much grounded in "everyday" concerns. Most importantly, perhaps, it is a way of building community and sharing history. It is very much worth our effort and time to listen to them for they surely give us great insight into daily life in the United States. That they are not created for mainstream media outlets as they now exist, does not mean they lack value, as is often the subtext in university courses. Just the contrary, they allow us a glimpse into current social and economic policies, starting and ending with the self. It is in this place we might cultivate a more empathetic ear and open our minds to the possibility of social justice.

### ***Conclusion***

Returning to academia at an age when most people are beginning to see the glimmer of retirement has had its challenges. None has been greater than the wall with which I have collided—at times repeatedly—attempting to create dialogue with mentors and colleagues who have rarely struggled, or perhaps have done so minimally, or have simply rarely questioned their privilege or the status quo. Generally good people who simply don't think about folks much outside their small circle of friends. Or when they

do, it is highly theorized and based on abstract notions of “class,” or “the margins.” I suppose this is true for people in most spheres, but in my experience, those who have never had to worry about putting food on the table tend to not, well, think about it too deeply. This is not to say that privileged individuals never consider the poor, as many are great allies, but outside those few scholars who work in a praxis-based manner, it has come to be a great frustration at the utter lack of genuine, daily interest in the people many scholars write about. Moreover, those walls where I have for years stood ringing the doorbell, knocking loudly, and—yes banging my head—are the walls that separate different disciplines. A percentage of members in each discipline are engaged in university/community-based work but they rarely speak to one another. Each discipline has its own activist scholarship but rather than building bridges with one another in solidarity, because they are doing the same work using a different vocabulary or slightly different lens, we each carry on alone. This project has taught me that if we genuinely care about social justice and the people with whom we work and write about, it will take a fusion of interdisciplinarity and community outreach to accomplish any lasting change. I have also learned in this study that human beings are unbelievably resilient. Individuals have a desire to heal from trauma and with a little guidance and attention from the people around them, this is a possibility for most.

The Trauma Healing Project, where I have conducted this research, is one organization that works tirelessly at building these bridges. It has strong connections with the University of Oregon (particularly the counseling psychology department) but struggles to secure funding. The workshops that I have been a part of are dependent upon grants, which are sporadic and unreliable. THP nonetheless perseveres with a mission

that recognizes daily loss of children, teens, and adults in our community. The need is great and immediate and the Trauma Healing Project attempts to support real people who need help *now*. Not in a month, not when the next legislative session meets, but today, yesterday more often than not. DST is one way they are able to do this, but rather than workshops being offered twice a month, or even once a month, they are able to host them, if they are fortunate, once a quarter. To be clear, these workshops are offered to low-income (sometimes homeless) residents of Lane County. THP receives no compensation from the participants, but the organizations with which they are affiliated usually help with food during the workshops. As stated earlier, at one workshop the youth were offered the incentive of a \$50 gift card to Target and this was supplied by the agency, not THP. People come to workshops to volunteer, for no pay, nonetheless. This says a lot about the workshop process as well as the commitment to healing and social justice these volunteers possess.

THP also struggles against the systemic and institutional ideologies of those in charge or employed by state agencies. More than once, the egos of therapists, caregivers, and family members worked in direct opposition to the storytellers and the digital storytelling process. Frankly, I found this to be one of the more surprising aspects of the workshop experience. At the Phoenix Program, we had to address attacks from two therapists who were outraged that “their” teens had told stories they had never heard during treatment. To be fair, in one case the young woman was soon heading home and her story revealed years of brutal abuse at the hands of her father. This, needless to say, threw her treatment schedule and therapist into a tailspin. What I found most shocking, however, was not the tailspin, but rather the anger at the digital storytelling process. I

sensed a deep and abiding insecurity in that particular therapist who was terribly threatened by a perceived loss of control. She actively worked against our future involvement at the Phoenix Program. This situation brings up a real concern for those who wish to incorporate alternative or art-based therapies into treatment programs: it is imperative that more pre-workshop processing be done with those who work on a daily basis with folks in treatment. Moreover, taking into consideration the newer psychological literature that challenges the notion that talking about and revisualizing traumatic events might, in fact, impede healing, those who work in a therapeutic context need to be aware of possible effects for their clients—both positive and negative.

At THP, we incorporated this insight into future workshops. This became necessary when working with adults with disabilities, as well, as we dealt with one caregiver who had absolute control over “her” adult, even down to speaking for him (due to a birth defect that made it extremely difficult for him to speak his thoughts even though his mind worked perfectly, needless to say, using a computer was fairly easy for him). After one evening’s work, this particular caregiver raged at two of us, accusing us of trying to tell a story that wasn’t his. This was eventually dealt with by conversations between everyone at THP and the agency she was employed by so this particular storyteller could finish his story. And the realization, at the end of the day, was that this caregiver was, in actual fact, controlling *his* story, which sent her into her own tailspin. Again, THP incorporated this awareness into future workshops. Although the data included here does not directly support this assumption, I would venture to say that the digital storytelling workshop process—and most forms of expression involving creative interpretation of past events—triggers unexpected feelings and insights that can be hard

to incorporate into the status quo. This simple fact can be both clarifying and devastating on many levels. When this happens with, for example, trauma survivors those who work with them on a daily basis need to be prepared for the possibility.

In some ways, this was the most challenging aspect of the study for me. My involvement is one based on a belief that personal efficacy can lead to empowerment and social engagement. Employing DST as an advocate for personal growth and social justice, digital storytelling as a *therapeutic tool* is confronted by ingrained policies and codes of conduct that I see working more to support a glossed-over blandness—the appearance of healing—than true recovery. The law mandates that we report ongoing abuse. How do we, as practitioners of liberation, comfortably say “you are allowed to tell any story you want in any way you’d like,” when it has to be followed by “...unless you tell us that your father abuses you, then we have to tell the authorities.” This, in effect, silences them and so the story gets buried a little deeper. Sweeping changes in the mental health, corrections, and educational systems are needed. This study cannot address the steps it will take to repair a broken system, but it can supply a small amount of validation of digital storytelling’s worth.

This dissertation has attempted to fill in certain gaps in the emerging scholarship of digital storytelling by looking at the workshop experience itself in the hopes of better understanding the inner experience of creating, and assisting in, the production of a digital story. This has been accomplished using the strategy of a narrative analysis of audio-recorded interviews, written evaluations, and audio-recorded closing circles with participants and assistants at the end of DST workshops. In this analysis, I separated the data into two categories (storyteller and assistant), and then ranked the responses

according to frequency of occurrence (Themes), focusing on the top five in each category. In the storyteller category, I analyzed eight themes, as three tied for third most common response. The assistant category had five responses that were clearly the most common. Those themes are listed here:

**Primary Themes: Storytellers**

1. Sharing my story/expressing myself helps me and others
2. Learned a new way of coping/viewing self, other, or event
3. Helped me to get over painful experience/feelings
4. Felt a release/freedom telling a story never talked about before
5. Enjoyed freedom of expression
6. Group pride/pride in another storyteller/pride in self
7. Learned computer skills/editing software
8. General appreciation at having been listened to

**Primary Themes: Adult Assistants**

1. Enjoyment in helping others express themselves
2. Honored to share in the process/Appreciation
3. Surprise/pleasure everyone learns editing program/computers quickly
4. Learned something new about self
5. Pleased that storytellers trust strangers

This project has been a labor of love. I am thankful for the opportunity and privilege



of working with community members who, despite the many challenges written about here, are positive and optimistic. The storytellers, who must remain anonymous, have overcome the most difficult of obstacles and are, at the end of the day, grateful for having been heard. Moreover, the commitment to equity, healing, and inclusion found in the assistants humbles me. Many of these volunteers are trauma survivors themselves and seem to have a calling to help others avoid a life suffering from suppressed pain. As was stated in one of the assistant's responses: "*...knowing that you are each a survivor and you have learned that you are a survivor through these videos at this phase in your life, while you're still young, and you didn't have to wait until like me...I got to be 60-something to learn that I was a survivor, so I really appreciate, you know, being a part of that.*" Finding ways to support organizations such as the Trauma Healing Project is an on-going effort and its express purpose, "to encourage a community's capacity for deep listening" is in alignment with other organizations around the country working to similar ends. For the individuals fortunate enough to participate in a digital storytelling workshop, the rewards seem to be profound. Many times I was told, "I want to come again and make another story," or "Now I can show others how to make them." This is what this process was created for. With no agenda other than facilitating the expression of voices lost in the shuffle of a neoliberal America, this desire to place value on the subjective experience is the very truest motive I have for completing this project.

The digital storytelling workshop experience and its confrontation with institutionalized power is a subtle affair. It challenges these structures through subjectivity and gentleness rather than banner-waving and cerebral smack-downs. DST allows for mistakes and the reimagining of personal experience through easy technology

learned in a supportive and open environment. This ability to reclaim and rework is perhaps its most dangerous weapon. For if we are able to change that which has been forced upon us in our individual lives through a creative reimagining, might this not ripple into our world at large? Digital Storytelling, by my estimation, is part of a wave of change whereby we the people are, to use bell hooks' phrase, "talking back" from the margins and that simple, yet powerful act, levels the playing field. Potentially. In the brightest moments I have seen individuals transformed by the process of creatively reimagining a terrible event in their life, releasing themselves from the shackles that bound them to it like a weight holding them beneath the waves. The workshop environment removes the risk of continued isolation brought about by the original experience and of a person-to-screen-only interaction because it is first, and foremost, an intimate, face-to-face collaboration. Learning to create a digital story teaches individuals how to use technology for expression and self-empowerment, thus connecting them to contemporary modes of communication as well as to a global movement for democracy and reclamation. Awareness of this proximity is carried into daily life and, one would hope, into interpersonal interactions as well. This step, from personal to relational efficacy is a natural trajectory in future studies of digital storytelling. I would like to reiterate that I come to this project with the express desire to help guide others through oppression and self-empowerment. I am not a therapist and have absolutely no desire to work with people in that capacity, although in my experience "therapy" is sometimes merely allowing someone to creatively express a story. Voices used against injustice as one avenue to rewrite forgotten and suppressed histories is where I stand in this study. Like the *testimonio* that brings to light injustice and the need for political action, so are

the stories of the folks I have worked with. Although not part of this study, my hope is that the people I have guided to tell their stories might take their empowerment one step further and reach out to their community and plug it into political action, challenging the forces of oppression that had previously kept them weighted down.

I came into this project with certain biases. They involved a belief that the voice matters and that telling stories is an essential human endeavor. In fact, it defines us as a social species. I do not believe we have collectively lost this skill to share tales, but we have placed more value on some voices, rejecting others that do not conform to a now-ailing patriarchy. The hierarchy that defines this paradigm has been well-documented in a thousand tomes and I will not rail here. There are many who can do so much more deftly than I. What I contribute to this discussion is a more micro-view of its effects on individual people who are the victims of its most brutal and destructive tendencies. Neglect, chronic poverty, violence, domination, greed, and a whole myriad list of other abuses whose cure is increasingly harder to get as social services are slashed by those in power. Children who, when born, enter generations-long situations that bury them before they have a chance to catch their breath. And yet. The glimmer of indomitable spirit that is also a human trait can nearly always be seen and shines out from them when given a space to express what they have seen. My involvement in digital storytelling keeps the inner fire lit and after each workshop—no matter how exhausted or whatever weighs me down in my own life—I leave with the knowledge that those four or six or nine individuals have had their inner fire kindled as well. To quote the Center for Digital Storytelling: “Change the story. Change the world.” It is in our acknowledgment that each person has the ability to change their story and by giving them the chance to do just

that where we become more human. Change the story. Change our world.

**APPENDIX A**  
**LIST OF QUESTIONS**

**Trauma Healing Project Evaluation Questions for Volunteers**

**THP Staff & Assistants (in the workshop)**

1. What was your role related to the workshop?
  
2. From your perspective, how did it go?
  - a. What worked?
  - b. What didn't?
  
3. Did anything surprise you? (process–participants–stories)
  
4. Is there anything you would change?
  
5. Do you have any recommendations or thoughts regarding future workshops?
  
6. Any other comments?

## **Trauma Healing Project Evaluation Questions for Participants**

1. What did you like the most about digital storytelling?
2. Is there anything you didn't like or wish was different?
3. Is there anything about the digital storytelling workshop or process that you think was helpful for you? Please explain.
4. Have you noticed any changes in yourself as a result of the digital storytelling workshop?
5. Did you notice any changes in others as a result of the workshop?
6. Did your relationship with other group members change in any way as a result of your participation in the workshop?
7. Do you think that creating a digital story helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you wouldn't otherwise.

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSCRIPTS

#### Phoenix Program 2

Individual Interview

Female 15

March 28, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

It was an opportunity to, like, open up...and like I learned something about myself in the meantime that I didn't know and...it was...it was fun. It wasn't like a "sit-down therapy session and learn what you're really feeling" (said in lower, authoritarian voice), it was like a way of *expressing* how you feel the same way as, like, explaining it to yourself, you know? So...I liked that a lot.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

Not really. Everything seemed like it was going just fine.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

Having enough people there to work with each person. That was it gave you one-on-one time but we also switched it up to get different perspectives on it and I really liked that

because, you know, you had a different perspective than XXX and XXX had a different perspective than XXX...and so...I just liked that a lot.

*Have you gone through a change since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

Yes, I have actually. I've been thinking about my mom a lot and how...it was different, you know I always thought it was because of the drugs and alcohol that, you know, that's the reason she did what she did, and she had a choice...but hearing the other people's stories about, like, the drugs in their life...it gave me an open view of like why she would have done that. And I don't have all that information so I shouldn't just...it's like I'm judging her, judging a book by its cover. So, that's pretty much what I was doing with my mom because I really don't know why she did what she did. And that's not ok for me to do if I don't like them doing then I shouldn't do it either. So...

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

They talked about it a lot during the workshop but when we came back here they kind of just put that back in and they didn't let it show like they did before. I know I did that too but I also talked to the staff...I don't know if they did cause I'm not them...and...it's like they're hiding in a shell again. But they're aware of it, of what they're doing and stuff, like their feelings and stuff, they just don't know how else to deal with it besides just having made a video of it.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into a part of yourself that you wouldn't otherwise?*



(Laughs) Um...yeah! I always thought I was OCD, just like a little bit, but it surprised me cause I looked at the clock and it was like 1:15 or something and I started working on this one piece so that the line would flow right and it still is not flowing right—which really ticked me off—but, that’s ok (laughs)...and I like spent 45 minutes on like a 2 second section, trying to make that flow right and I did not realize how much time I had spent on that **one** little thing and I was like “Oh, my gosh! This is not ok. I need to get some help here!” It was just cool to see that things matter to me and that, umm, and I think the reason I do it is because nothing’s ever been perfect in my life and I just want that, something there that’s perfect and so I want to make everything else perfect around me...but sometimes in the process I end up making things worse (laughs). But just being aware of that really helped me. Like last night there was...well, like today, XXX lost her project and wasn’t very happy that she had lost it on the computer but she...she told me to leave and I wanted to be like “XXX, you know this is what you need to do...” and tell her all the steps to get it there and she was like “NO. Go away, I don’t want to talk to you” and I really just wanted to say “XXX! I can fix it for you, I can make it perfect just like you want it!” But instead, I was like “ok. It’s your presentation not mine. You have the choice of what you want to do, so...I’m going to respect that.” I waked away and I gave her space and later she came up and said “You know, I was really rude to you” and stuff like that... So it really helped me to realize that sometimes in order to make things perfect you have to take a step back.

*So what about this process was not helpful? Are there any changes you would suggest?*

I think in this one specifically, everyone opened up about a lot of things, like I opened up about my mom...but that's not something that's too secretive because a lot of people know I really don't like my mom...I mean I love her but I don't necessarily have to like her...so I don't necessarily feel like I expressed a lot about that, but I feel like there's a lot of people like that. I think it would have been more of *my* story if I had used something more deeper but I didn't know...I already had something that I wanted to talk about but I guess I'm just at that stage to talk about it freely because no one really knows about this. I mean there's like three people who know about it and I don't want to let anyone else know about it. I've told a couple of people about it in here...

*In the workshop, is there anything we could have done to have helped you tell that story or another story?*

I guess, there really isn't because...I guess to be there more often...

*You mean more than 3 days?*

No. I mean when people are working on it, sitting there and checking in with them to see if there's something bothering them because...like I sat there for like 10 minutes trying to get the levels to go down and then...I guess, express that, I know you guys said that, but more tell us "ask questions, ask questions, ask questions." That should actually be on the board thing, you know where we wrote all the rules..."ask questions!" Because I know If I had asked that one question it would have saved me a bunch of time on how to fix that (laughs), but that's ok. I learned a different way of how to do it, too.

## **Phoenix Program 2**

Individual Interview 2

Female 15

March 28, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

I liked most about the fact that everyone was appreciative of our stories and they didn't say, like, "oh, you can't do this cause it has profanity in it or you can't do that cause it's around drug use" and stuff...and everyone was just open to hearing it. And I think it helped me personally by getting off the tensions I had built up for so long inside me and could just speak it and everyone was not judgmental and they just cared about everyone.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

No, not really cause I'm so used to the thing...(laughs).

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

It was helpful because, like, you know it's one thing to just write a story and then speak it and then make a movie about it but the way I felt about it was that it expressed us all in individual ways and I thought that was really cool and it helped everyone understand each other more and built a stronger relationship between us all because now we know a little bit more about that person and what other people wouldn't know about.

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

Yeah. Because...I just...I thought my last boyfriend was my one and only and I thought I'd never be able to heal from that and become who I used to be and having the support I have now...and everyone is understanding about it and they don't just peer pressure me into it anymore...

*And the DS process helped you to understand that?*

Yeah.

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

I noticed a lot more after hearing from one of the people and they had a strong relationship with someone that was about abuse and neglect and they've overcome that and they talk about how much they actually love that person and how much they [garbled] even though it was in a rude way.

*Do you feel like your relationship with others has changed since the workshop?*

I had my best friend in there and she's always talked to me about things in her life and this one thing she's never talked to me about or anyone else and I've known her since the day I was born and our friendship has really grown off of that. Just her talking about that is like...now that she's opened her heart to healing she's come to me and asked me for a lot of help and encouragement and I love her to death and just hearing her ask me for help with this has changed my perspective about our friendship...you know it's one thing to

help her but I never got to help her grow because...well, I got to help her this time and now I know I can help her a lot and she can help me a lot.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into a parts of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Yeah because, like, last night during check in one of questions was “ is there anything you've learned more about yourself?” And I've just learned that I have a lot of healing process to do and this was a really big major one and I would have never realized that if hadn't been for the digital story and I thought that was cool.

*So what about this process was not helpful? Are there any changes you would suggest?*

It's pretty easy to get everything done within 3 days and so I think if we did this again...just making...I don't know what I'm trying to say...how do I say this? Making it longer, I guess. I know if I had longer to work on this I think I would eventually overcome a lot more, so if I had a longer story to go off of, I could have probably done a lot with it.

*So making it longer and allowing the stories to be longer?*

Yeah. Oh! And there's one more thing I also learned...I also learned how to use empathy, putting myself into someone else's position. Watching their stories helped me to use empathy and when I had gave feedback it wasn't like “this thing sucks” it was more helpful feedback...and I learned to use patience, too.

**Phoenix Program 2**

Individual Interview 3

Male 15

March 28, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

I like that it gave us a chance to share our story, if we had something to tell, and talk about it and be creative with it.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

No.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

I think it was helpful that there so many helpers that would help us because they really helped me out when I didn't know what was going on

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

I feel like I know how to say things better.

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

I noticed that people were a lot more positive and that people really got into it.

*Do you feel like your relationship with others has changed since the workshop?*

Yes, I have. I feel like my relationships with others have grown stronger.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Yes, I felt like I wouldn't have done this on my own or something like this

*So what about this process was not helpful? Are there any changes you would suggest?*

The super slow computer! (laughs)

## Phoenix Program 2 Workshop

Closing Circle

March 28, 2012

Lead 1: Alright, so we're just going to do a closing circle. We're going to do it as a little bit longer conversation than we did before, but it's a similar concept...only this check out is going to be a checkout about the whole workshop, ok? So this is a chance to say...what you...most liked or appreciated about these last two or two and half days together...and who's gonna start?

Youth Storyteller 1: I liked that you guys let us express ourselves in the way that we wanted to be expressed...it really bothers me when people don't let me, like, be who I want to be...like, that's the fastest way for somebody to like make me not like them...so, yeah...if somebody tells me to be a certain way which isn't me, it like really ticks me off really fast, it really does.

Youth Storyteller 2: Umm...like I said earlier when...after everybody showed their thing, is like...I like how everybody used it for something deep and something meaningful. And I felt like that brought everybody, like it brought us peers closer together in a way 'cause we know certain things now...

(group agreement)



Youth Storyteller 3: I liked that, like when we were making our movies we didn't have to, like, keep it "PG." We were able to have it be the way we wanted it to be...and, like, use the pictures that we wanted and...um...and the music how we wanted it.

Youth Storyteller 4: Um...I think it was pretty cool we got to everything pretty much by ourselves, like once we learned the basics, we were just kind of left alone. If we asked for help we got it, but if we wanted to do it ourselves we had the opportunity to learn our own way and make it our own way and have our own sound effects and make it different and stand out.

Assistant 1: I liked watching how quickly you all picked this stuff up! XXX shows you 5 seconds of computer stuff and you're on it! And you've got it down and I'm always very impressed by that...and I really...I just like the whole process of you guys getting to do your own thing. It is, like XXX said, your kind of just set free and you get to be who you are and create how you want to create and I think that's really important.

Assistant 1: You wanted to say something else?

Youth Storyteller 2: Yeah, I wanted to say that I liked how me and XXX are a good team...we showed my computer who's boss...

(group laughter)

...I also like how some of the things that have happened and then looking at the past and then the present that made me realize why I do some of the things I do and why I react in certain ways to certain things or even, you know, just how I am now...like the way I act, the way I dress, the way I talk to people...(garbled)...

Lead 2: I think the thing that means the most to me is that I come in here and you guys don't know me at all and yet, you open yourselves up and you tell these really...you know...amazing stories of lives you've overcome...and you are open enough...even with so many things that have happened, you're so open and you tell these stories and you trust us enough to feel like you can communicate that. And that means a lot to me and I'm just really proud of all of you guys. You did just such a great job. All of your stories.

Assistant 3: What I like...it's like watching the slow-motion of a rose opening up...just discovering the beauty on the inside. And what's really nice is knowing that you are each a survivor and you have learned that you are a survivor through these videos at this phase in your life, while you're still young, and you didn't have to wait until like me...I got to be 60-something to learn that I was a survivor, so I really appreciate, you know, being a part of that.

Assistant 4: I'm just so truly amazed that this can happen in such a short period of time and I'm really honored to have participated in this group. And I must say that I was not in such a good place myself and was wondering if I really wanted to do this...and all the energy that built throughout the time...I am so glad that I chose to do it. Thank you.

Assistant 5: I think it's amazing that you can come in here with an outline for a story and 2.5 days later you can come away with completed stories...um...all of your stories were amazing and thank you for trusting us and sharing them with us.

Assistant 6: I appreciated that everybody took it seriously. It's serious subject matters for each of you and I think you can be silly with it, you can play it off as not really important, but you all took yourselves seriously and took the project seriously and it reaffirmed my faith in each one of you.

Youth Storyteller 5: I really appreciated the fact that I could express myself in ways...just writing my story and just opening up and not holding back any emotions, like I got to express something that I've never really known about myself until now and just knowing that I've opened up about that...reading my story and hearing my story and watching my movie...it just opened my heart to make more room for me to love someone else. Just like every time I play it now I know it's going to end up opening me up a little bit more.

Youth Storyteller 6: What I really enjoyed about it is that, like...I talked about something that...not many people know...I mean, they know I don't really like my mom and stuff, but...they didn't know the behind the scenes of it and it gave me the chance to get that out, even though she knows about it and my close family knew about it, no one

else did, so it was just a chance for me to like share that that was how I was feeling and so...I just felt like it was really a time for me to be honest with myself as well...so...

Youth Storyteller 7: I appreciated the opportunity...I really thought it was cool how we all got to do our own thing and I really appreciated that.

Lead 1: I'd like to echo a couple of things that other people have said and that is that I just feel honored to have been here. I know I was kind of climbing around, doing things behind the scenes while other people were a little more hands-on but I was paying attention...a lot...to what was going on and what people were doing and I feel really honored to be with each of you and also to get to do this kind of project. It means a lot and I also really noticed people...not just coming more to life and engaging more in the activity but also I really, really appreciated the way you all cared for each other. It was really dear to watch the way...even when things got frustrating and hard for different ones of you the rest of you just made space and you were respectful and gentle with each other and respectful of the stories, too, and that's...um...that's a big gift that you have given each other and I appreciate being a little part of.

**Looking Glass/Opal Center**

Individual 1, 11 year old male

July 27, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

I like it...like...when we did the Macintosh computers and...how we did the whole thing.

*The whole putting it together?*

Yeah, the whole process.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

No, there's nothing 'cause everything was great.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

What was especially helpful for me was learning how to do the...umm...Final Cut

Express.

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

Yeah. I have. I've noticed that I've gotten better at computers and got better at learning how to do more stuff.

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

I didn't.

*Do you feel like your relationship with others has changed since the workshop?*

Yeah...(sounds surprised).

*Do you want to explain that?*

I can't. It's kind of hard to explain it.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Yeah...sometimes it's hard to explain stuff...

*I know it is!*

I can't...

*But you definitely felt like you tapped into something new...*

Yeah.



**Looking Glass/Opal Center**

Individual 2, 11 year old male

July 27, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

Probably the people I got to meet and that it was on the computers.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

No, 'cause it was all really good.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

That I had my partner help me...she was just a good helper.

*The adult helpers?*

Yeah.

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

I don't think so.

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

Yeah. I noticed a change in XXX! He pulled himself together and he's never done it before.



*Do you feel like your relationship with others has changed since the workshop?*

No I don't think so.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Yeah, kind of.

*Could you name that?*

No, not really...

*You just know that you tapped into something...*

Yeah.

**Looking Glass/Opal Center**

Individual 3, 13 year old male

July 27, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

The environment.

*Do you want to explain what that is to you?*

The people around that I worked with and the place we worked in... everything like that.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

PCs not Macs!! Not Macs! (both laugh). Nothing. It was awesome.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

Learning the new program itself was cool—now I know how to use it and I'm probably going to end up making more stories!

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

I feel like I can talk about my brother more...it's a lot easier to explain it to people now:

“here! Here's the disc!”

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

Yeah! I noticed everybody I brought here who I just met not too long ago before I brought them in and I thought they weren't going to like it at all...I thought those kids were gonna be like "aww, this is stupid..." and they ended up loving it! It's kind of like a trap, a mind control thing...(both laugh)...Macs are set to mind control...(laughs)

*You PC users! You're all the same...you just hate Macs...*

(both laugh)

*Do you feel like your relationship with others has changed since the workshop?*

Nothing changed...they were all very nice and fun to work with.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Definitely.

*Do you want to explain that a little bit?*

I don't really talk to people much and being able to talk to a computer...it doesn't talk back so it's a lot easier...and...I just feel like I can talk about it more now.

**Looking Glass/Opal Center**

Individual 4, 16 year old female

July 27, 2012

*What did you like most about digital storytelling?*

That it helped me get my story out there for others to hear.

*Is there anything you didn't like or you wish was different?*

No. It was perfect the way it was.

*What do you think about the DS process was helpful for you?*

Hmmm...that's hard...oh, gosh (laughs a little)...the part at first that I didn't really understand was the Final Cut, I was like "why do we have to do this?" you know, we already have it recorded, but then, I now understand the reason why we did that so we can, like, add some life into our story, so other people can actually see what we're going through, through pictures...

*So that was helpful for you so you could tell your story, you could visualize it for people, too?*

Yeah.

*Have you gone through, or feel, any changes in yourself since creating a digital story—or is it too fresh?*

Yes, I have. The changes I've noticed is that now, you know, I'm not afraid to be myself no more, 'cause I used to kind of hold back and not really do anything. But now, if it wasn't for this class I'd still be kept up at home...reading books...(both laugh).

*Did you notice any changes with the others in the workshop?*

I think XXX and the rest of them...they weren't kind of not sure if they wanted to join the class...I remember XXX said "my dad's making me come!"... (both laugh)...but now that they actually kind of joined in I think they're actually really liking this class and don't want it to end.

*Do you think creating a DS helped you to tap into areas of yourself that you didn't know were there?*

Yes, I do.

*Can you explain that a little bit?*

Umm...like, I really don't like to remember how I used to cut my wrists, you know, harm my body in that way or anything when that happened to me in the past, but digital storytelling kind of helped me realize, "hey, it's ok" you know, it makes my personality because of what happened. Now, it's like, "I'm here!" you know and I like that.

## Looking Glass/Opal Center

Closing Circle

July 27, 2012

Storyteller 1: I think we should all open this circle with what's made us the most proud during this entire workshop...what are we the most proud of?

Assistant 1: Umm...I think I'm most proud of seeing how awesome a group of kids who are dedicated to a project can create something they can be proud of and I'm most proud of learning to use Final Cut and being to help you guys out because I came to this workshop not knowing how to do any of it, so...

Storyteller 1: Is this your first workshop?

Assistant 1: Uh-huh. Yeah!

Storyteller 2: ...I forgot what I was gonna say...

(everyone laughs)...oops...

Lead 1: Ok. What am I most proud of? I am...it's similar to what XXX said, I'm most proud of all you young folks come in here and just jumping right in and just doing it so

quickly—I'm just really proud of you guys, you know. It's amazing to me when I think of that first hour that we were here and ya'll were like, "Uhh, no, no no. Ok, bye." And then you ended up staying...and I'm really proud of ya'll for that and for rockin' it.

Assistant 2: I think it really goes along with XXX and XXX, is that even though you came in with your minds closed and one of you didn't want to come and do it, but you were willing to open up and look and see and give it a try and you liked it and I think that's amazing.

Storyteller 1: I think I'm most proud of XXX because of he doesn't get his work done at school and he's usually the slow person and this time, he was almost the fastest person and I think he did really good.

Storyteller 2: I'm most proud of how you guys, all the adults who helped us with our stories and how all of us, like, just went really fast.

Assistant 3: I am most proud...well, I am very proud of all of you guys creating your stories and in record time and they're awesome stories and the recordings were really great. It was just a really great workshop and I very much enjoyed doing it with all of you.

Lead 2: Ditto to everything everybody else has said, so I agree with everything everyone else has said and I'm really proud of the team that came down here to help you all and

how dedicated the team has been to supporting all of you to getting your stories and how consistent everybody's been and ready to go and thinking ahead, so thanks to all of you. It's also hard to help someone make changes to their story because it feels so intimate or vulnerable like you've got a story and we kind of tell that if you said it a little bit this way or a little bit that way, it might be easier to understand but...you don't want to step on anybody's toes so I'm really pleased that the adult partners were really able to get in there and help you all kind of make get better and better and that you were all willing to accept the feedback. That's really phenomenal. You made us feel more comfortable helping you with your story because you've been so open with us and our feedback. And you've also been strong where you've wanted to be strong. It's like I felt like I could tell you whatever I thought without worrying that you would do it just cause I said so. So if you felt strongly that it needed to be said "this" way, you didn't change it, which meant I could give you feedback without worrying about you, so...I don't know if you understand kind of what I'm saying but you're all really strong and you also took feedback in your stories that I can't wait to see because of that.

Storyteller 3: I'm most proud of everyone coming and not missing a day of it and sticking through all of it...it doesn't even feel like 5 days...it went fast.

Storyteller 4: I'm most proud of the whole...everybody here. It's nice that people like you go out of your way to better other people's lives. It's nice to have people like that in our community.



(many thank you's from the circle)

Storyteller 5: I'm really proud of all you guys because if you guys weren't here us kids would be probably be doing something to get in trouble! (chuckles from people)...in the summer kids are getting in trouble, getting in trouble with the cops and if it wasn't for you guys we wouldn't have this class to keep us out of trouble and have fun, you know. So I'm really proud of you guys...(garbled)..to come and teach us how to do this.

Assistant 4: Well, I agree with everybody, being the last person...there's almost nothing to say...

Storyteller 1: Have I noticed that you're almost always the last person?

Assistant 4: Yes.

Storyteller 1: You just always seem like the person who has nothing to say...

Assistant 4: ...because I'm the last person...(laughter)...

Storyteller 1: Last but not least.

Assistant 4: Uh-huh. I have to say I heard a lot about trust with a lot of different people in here and I've been most impressed with how everybody's been able to trust everybody

else. That's really huge to have that trust that quickly and to maintain it. I think that's really powerful. So along with what everybody else said, I think trust is one of the foundations, one of the keys to building relationships. So, I'm glad you were all here and I'm glad you all stayed.

**Full Access/OSLP**

Closing Circle

October 13, 2012

*What is something that you learned or a highlight from the workshop?*

Storyteller 1: I'll start. Showing XXX how to do a program with XXX's computer today and I'm proud of it, then...(cries)...I cried when my story came up...I got emotional and I didn't mean to, it just happened...it just turned out the way I wanted it and I appreciate everybody being there for me.

Storyteller 2: Well, I guess, the thing that I liked was...being with everybody and worked as a team, got along...that was the first thing that seen XXX cry and...that's a good thing, she needs a good cry. I'm glad to be able to...

Asst. 1: I think the highlight for me is I feel...I just feel really honored that all of you have opened up and told these stories about your life. You know, we've only known each other for five days and it's just amazing to me that in that five day time ya'll have told really intimate, touching stories and...that means a lot to me. And I thank you all.

(thank you's from a few people)

Storyteller 3: Well, I thought I couldn't tell a story, but when I thought it over, the story just come. But it's actually a true story, I mean, even to this day I still miss my father, but I managed to get a long the best way I can...is all...that's it.

Asst. 2: I learned a new editing program, that was cool.

Storyteller 4: *{this storyteller has difficulty speaking, so an assistant repeated the question and asked "what was your favorite thing?"}* See my mom. 2004 she died. Stomach cancer. In hospital, she died in hospital. Made me cry. [this is in reference to photographs XXX used for the digital story]

Asst. 3: I think what I learned was how to make new friends and how to be patient and understanding of other people's needs.

Asst. 4: Well, I'm always apprehensive not knowing what's going to happen as far as where...where's the energy going to come from and it comes from...it just happens. And I just really appreciate getting a chance to meet other people, human to human.

Storyteller 5: I'm XXX and I like the way the class is set up and I like my peers and I liked the...um...how it all came together...and it makes my heart happy that people have done this with my life. And I really appreciate the time and effort that you guys have done for me.

Guest Storyteller: [from a previous workshop who attended the screening for this workshop]: I'm just glad that I was able to come here and support XXX.

Asst. 5: And thanks for sharing your story again.

Storyteller 1: That was the first time I've seen your story, XXX, and I appreciate seeing it.

Storyteller 2: Me, too. Thank you very much and I'm very sorry that you lost him.

Storyteller 1: He's probably saying "I'm proud of you. You've shared what most people don't get to do. He's looking down at you."

Guest Storyteller: I think so.

Storyteller 1: I don't think so, I know so!

(laughter)

Assistant 5: I just want to acknowledge the love and kindness and attention and willingness that everybody brought to this process...um...it's always hard when there's emotional things to talk about and when there's lots of people with lots of different emotional stuff...and it always feels kind of like...it's always peaceful day 1 and day 2 it's a little less peaceful and by day 3 it feels like chaos and a tornado hit...

(laughter)

...and day five I broke the hard drive—I wish I could tell you it's the last time I'll ever do that—but it's just kind of part of the picture that things get topsy turvey...and your stories are so fantastic! And not because of the production quality of the movies, even though that's fantastic, but because you all sort of put your hearts out there and...uh...that's a brave thing and you all stuck to your ideas about what you wanted and where and, and, I just feel honored and blessed. There's a lot of behind the scenes work besides the people that you saw here including from OSLP and from Full Access, getting people ready and getting people organized and getting people here and lunch that came and treats that were brought...there were a lot of wonderful details that made all details all the way down to the popcorn and peanuts and, you know, the way we took care of the place and each other. So thank you all for doing this and hopefully you all got a flyer about the festival and it sounds like you all want to show your pieces and it sounds like XXX is willing to help pack the theater. So tell all your friends and bring all your friends and we'll make a big party out of it. Thank you all and take good care of yourselves and take your two DVDs home and remember we going to put subtitles on all of yours for the festival so don't be surprised if you see yours in Spanish or in Spanish and English written across the bottom...another thing I wanted to say is that your hearts get tender after processes like this sometimes we get opened up and that means you have to take extra special care of yourselves. So be careful who you show your stories to...show your

stories to people who will love you and be really pleased with you. Drink lots of water and get good sleep and love each other up. Thanks everybody—it's a wrap!

## Full Access 1

Closing Circle

April, 2012

Asst. 1: What we would really like to do is...just a quick go around...not a quick go around but a go around for everybody who's been involved and been involved in helping...umm...what did you think? Something you liked about the workshop, all the days, not just today, this is the whole workshop. Something that you appreciated about this workshop, whether you're an assistant or an observer or a storyteller...something that you have liked about this workshop and anybody who wants to start ...

Asst. 2: I think the main thing that I really, really appreciate is each of the participants' willingness to tell their stories, each of the storytellers to be able to come in here and tell them and be patient enough to go through the process—I really appreciate that. I've learned, even as they have been learning, I learn things...

Storyteller 1: I'm XXX and I've enjoyed this time because I've learned a Mac computer and I'm glad that everybody helped me with this...

Asst. 1: ...we're glad you were here to help is through it, too.

Storyteller 1: Uh-huh, thank you.



Asst. 3: My name's XXX and it's just so exciting for me to see it all come together...and it's not just coming together from the story aspect but the energy that builds...it's just a pleasure to be part of that.

Asst. 4: For me, uh, I just want to say that seeing all the participants building their stories and having built a story myself I know the frustrations and obstacles that were...just seeing other people go through the process and being part of that helped me...

Storyteller 2: I'm XXX and my story went very well and it was fun!

Asst. 5: My name's XXX and I liked everything!

(everyone laughs)

Asst. 1: Anything specific?

Asst. 5: I really liked how quickly these came together, you know, we're having a little technical difficulties this afternoon, but as far as the editing and learning the software and...I mean...you guys are just so fast! And they're all beautiful stories.

Asst. 6: I loved the dedication and enthusiasm that was shown to learning new technology and working on the stories and that everyone was pretty positive and upbeat about the whole process, so it was really fun to watch everyone create their stories.

Storyteller 3: I like, umm, I like to learn how to, uh, do something like that...that we can never get to do, like professional makers do. This is a learning place.

Asst. 7: I'm XXX and I appreciated how everybody worked on their stories and I want to thank people for letting me come hang out and observe and I think that it will, in the work that I do in making videos and stuff like that I think having seen and heard what you do will have an effect on how I do my own work, so, thank you for that.

Asst. 1: My name is XXX and the think I liked the most is that in the middle of chaos, everybody knew what they were doing. It's like it could feel like everybody was at a different place at a different moment when you walk in the room but every time I said "Well, what are you doing..." everybody knew exactly what you were doing the whole way through! It was really neat. And the stories are really fantastic and I have to say thank you to the assistants who have been working on this project...[names volunteers]...it's just been great to have the support through this whole process; so solid a group of people...it's been great, it's been awesome.

Storyteller 4: It was really neat to have people...umm...I could listen to their stories...I like it when people come together...and it feels good to have people together...I never had that experience before. And I got to experience it myself.

Storyteller 5: I liked everything.

(soft laughter all around)

It got me out of my apartment for a couple hours (laughs)...

Asst. 1: Yeah, there's that part, too. (laughs)...

Family member of a Storyteller (Witness): Well, I was very impressed with the whole project and the idea of it. It felt like you guys were really well organized, had, umm, all the pieces in place ready for whenever the storyteller was ready for that part you guys were ready with whatever they needed. The day I was here working with XXX I was real impressed with all the help you had available.

Asst. 1: Anybody else here witnessing these last couple of days have anything they'd like to add?

Witness 2: Well, I happen to be here on day one and I'm just really happy for everybody, especially the storytellers cause I think that anytime something is new it can be scary but you guys are still here and I'm so excited to see these movies!

Witness 3: This has been a real commitment and it's great that it's worked out so well and Full Access is looking forward to doing it again...and maybe if you folks are willing to show your movies to other folks that would be useful. Thank you so much.

## APPENDIX C

### EXAMPLE OF WRITTEN EVALUATIONS: STORYTELLERS

#### Digital Storytelling Workshop Evaluation

1) How would you rate your experience with the *process* of creating your story?

- 😄 I really really liked it a lot!
- 😊 I really liked it!
- 😊 I liked it
- 😐 It was okay
- 😞 I didn't like it at all






Comments about the process:

2) Do you think making a digital story will make your life better in some way?

- 😄 Yes, a lot!
- 😊 Yes, somewhat.
- 😐 I don't know
- 😞 No

Comments (if yes, how? If no, why not?):

3) Are you satisfied with the digital story you made?

-  Yes I really really like it a lot!
-  I really like it!
-  I like it
-  It's okay
-  I don't like it at all

Comments:

4) What improvements or changes would you like to see us make to our workshops in the future?

None

5) Any other comments?

## APPENDIX D

### EXAMPLE OF WRITTEN EVALUATIONS ADULT ASSISTANTS

**Dear Workshop Assistant/Instructor:**

Thank you for participating in the South Lane Digital Storytelling Workshop! Please take a few minutes to complete this anonymous survey. Please do not put your name on the survey as we want to make sure you feel free to share openly about your experiences.

**1) How would you rate your experience with the *process* of the workshop?**

- Exceptional (extremely satisfied with the experience)
- Very good
- Good
- Okay
- Not good

Comments:

**2) Do you think assisting with the workshop helped you in any way?**

- Yes, very much so
- Yes, somewhat
- I don't know
- No

Comments (If yes, how? If no, why not?):

**3) Were you satisfied with the digital stories that were made?**

- Yes, very much so
- Yes, somewhat
- I don't know
- Not as satisfied as I wanted to be
- Not at all satisfied

Comments:

4) How did witnessing the stories affect you?

They were moving, I felt like I learned a lot from the young participants

4

5) Is there anything you would change about the workshop or wish we had done differently?

Nope

6) What did you like best about the workshop?

7) Would you recommend this workshop be given to other youth?

- Yes, very much so
- Yes, somewhat
- I don't know
- No

Comments (why or why not?):

8) Any other comments?



## APPENDIX E

### SAMPLE WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

#### Full Access Digital Storytelling Workshop Schedule

##### Tuesday, April 24

2:00 - 2:15	Introductions/Welcome - Introductions - self + story - Group Agreements
2:15 - 3:15	-Seven Steps (30 min), Pairs Activity
3:15 - 3:45	Break
3:45 - 5:45	Story Circle - Circle Agreements - Sharing Stories - Debrief
5:45 - 6:00	Closing Circle

##### Thursday, April 26

2:00 - 2:15	Opening the Circle
2:15 - 4:15	Mac Basics and File Management - Creating Working Folder - Opening/Creating Documents - Intro to Creative Commons/Internet
4:15 - 4:45	Break
4:45 - 5:45	Story Editing/Gathering Material

5:45 - 6:00	Closing Circle

**Tuesday, May 3**

2:00 - 2:15	Opening the Circle
2:15 - 4:15	Story Editing/Gathering Material Voiceovers for anyone who's ready
4:15 - 4:45	Break
4:45 - 5:45	Voiceovers/Gathering Material
5:45 - 6:00	Closing the Circle

**Thursday, May 5**

2:00 - 2:15	Open the Circle
2:15 - 4:15	Building Our Stories - Final Cut Express (Tutorial #1) - Practice - More Final Cut (Tutorial #2) - Practice
4:15 - 4:45	Break
4:45 - 5:45	Building Our Stories Continues Gathering Materials
5:45 - 6:00	Close

**Tuesday, May 10**

2:00 - 2:15	Open
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2:15 - 4:15	Building our Stories
4:15 - 4:45	Break
4:45 - 5:45	Building Our Stories
5:45 - 6:00	
<b>Thursday, May 12</b>	
2:00 - 2:15	Opening the Circle
2:15 - 4:15	Finishing Our Stories
4:15 - 4:45	Break
4:45 5:15	Final Touches/DVD Burning
5:15 - 5:45	Screening
5:45 - 6:00	Festival Info/Interview & Eval/Closing Circle

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