

Storytelling as a Healing Modality

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“You don’t have anything if you don’t have stories.”

Storytelling as a Healing Modality explores the cultural practice of storytelling as an indigenous healing modality within a native trauma-informed care model, with an experiential focus on three types of healing stories.

Trauma Informed Care

- 1) Safety: Paiute North Star story
- 1) Telling the Story: Kairos Blanket Exercise
- 1) Reintegration/Reconnection: Cahuilla Bird Songs

Storytelling Youth & Saver

- We have stopped relying on our intuitive ways of knowing, and stopped practicing our most fundamental human ways of communicating with one another.
- Storytelling is fundamentally human, and narrative is a basic frame of being human.
- Once we lose our ability to construct narrative, we lose ourselves. This loss of self has been experienced in many Native communities through the process of historical trauma; as such, it is critical that storytelling and narrative be revitalized in communities in order to restore self-identity as well as communal/tribal identity.

Paiute Legend of the North Star

Nahgah, son of Shinoh



Resourcing



DEFENSIVE THREAT RESPONSE

Fight -- Flight



Freeze



Freeze is physical immobility (e.g., “I froze,” “I couldn’t scream/move,” etc.).

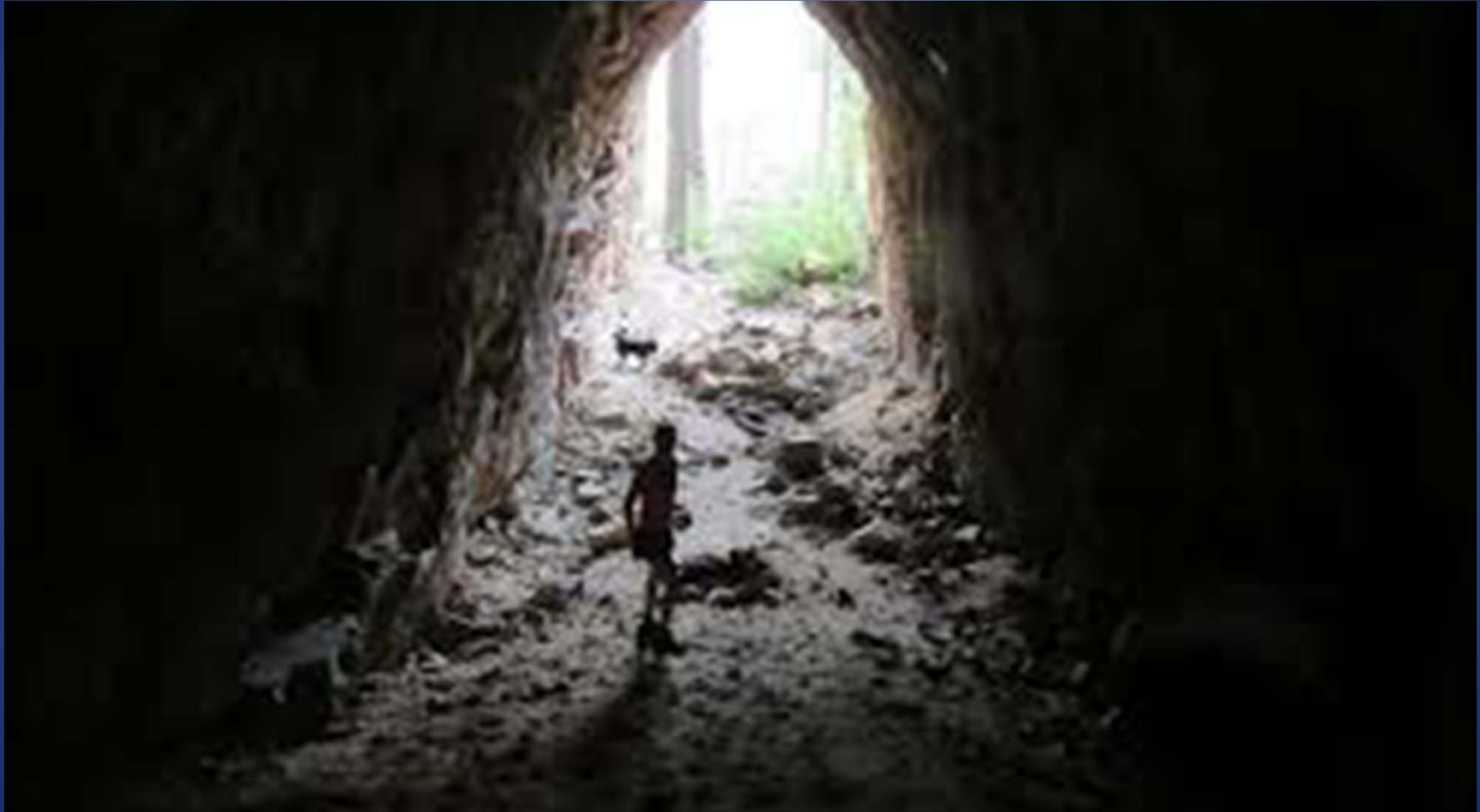
Dissociation is mental and emotional withdrawal (e.g., “I blanked out,” “I left my body,” “I went numb,” etc.).

They occur when: A) the intensity of the threat and fear is so great that it overwhelms the nervous system, and/ or B) a person realizes that fighting back or fleeing is likely to make the consequences worse.

Interrupted, Disconnected Process

- First Contact: An interrupt; An event that alters the sequence in which the processor executes instructions. – Nervous system becomes dysregulated-out of balance--forget.
- Trauma: Historical and Current Colonization--Disconnection from ourselves, each other, the natural world.
- Reinidiginization. Original Instructions embedded within our creation stories and tied to that is a relational worldview, that's also embedded in our language.– Indigenous culture has many ways to regulate our nervous systems--Remember.

Out of Immobility



SAFETY



Thea M. Lee, M.A., LMFT(CA), SEP and Tommy Lee Woon, M.S., SEP

Common causes for the interruption in the sequence include:

- Not wanting to feel out of control all over again from the sensations of energy release (e.g., trembling, tingling, tearing up, etc.): We often tell ourselves to “get a grip,” “Just get over it,” etc.)
- Situational priorities (e.g., needing to attend to a child’s needs)
- On-going stressors/threats (e.g., repeated sexual abuse/violence in family, wars, colonialism, prejudice/ discrimination, lack of full rights and equality, chronic poverty, vicarious trauma for providers, etc.)
- New situations that cause more stress responses (e.g., not being believed, being blamed, living in refugee camps, denial of the reality of oppression by individuals as well as the society, etc.)

Leslie Marmon Silko

- *“For Tayo, survival is contingent on his ability to keep telling the story, to continue the circulation of narrations and words that make up the past, present and future of Native American culture. The Army doctors are stifling this flow, severing the links that comprise the chain of time that sustains his people. White people's medicine is poison for Tayo.”*



Cahuilla Bird Songs

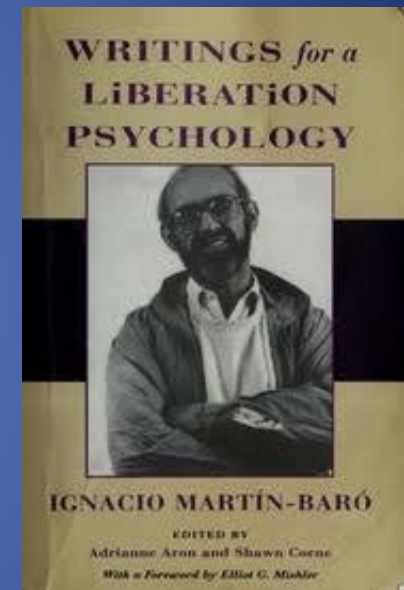
- Because Native American activism is not focused on reconstruction after a conflict, but rather liberation from a system which has been against Native Americans and their cultural freedom for generations, the psychology which is more pertinent to examining Native American activism and the potential of political praxis to be psychologically healing would be the study of **the psychology of liberation.**

Liberation Psychology

- Genesis of the problem: Living in a world taken over by an imposed mythology that has caused and continues to cause massive suffering.
- Not accept euro concentric view of the problem.
- My healing comes from learning how I fit in with my cosmology—Relational Worldview

Ignacio Martin Baro

- Psychology to transform lives and rehumanize the world.
- We must acquire a consciousness to permit us to go beyond the limits imposed on us by our socialization and the boundaries of our profession.



Liberation Psychology

Recovery of historical memory. If focused on basic needs here and now can't learn from experience or find roots in identity which is needed to interpret the present and get glimpses of what's possible alternatives.

Discover selectively through collective memory elements of the past which have proven useful in defense of interests of exploited classes which may be applied to present struggles.

Recover identity, pride in belonging, reliance on tradition and culture and resave those aspects of identity which served yesterday and will serve today for liberation.

Utilize people's virtues

Reindigenization



Cahuilla Bird Songs

- Story as a live entity with a spirit. Story tells itself. The story isn't merely content which objectifies the story as in western cosmology, The story comes to life in the process of telling it and transforms the material world and the human participants.



Cultural Humility:

Part 3

3. Develop partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others.

Telling the Story

- Individuals must look at their own background and social environment and how it has shaped their experience, and we would add, individuals need to take a historical/political perspective which expands their inquiry from individual history, and focuses it on the larger societal biases that have been cultivated through oppression and colonization across centuries both within and between cultures.
- Working with indigenous people requires that we look with a long-range view that incorporates historical and political factors contributing to colonization and oppression and how those factors impact our lives and the people we work with today.
- “We must go back to the beginning.”

Trauma Informed Care

Expand the Story

- Tell the story in the broader context—no longer a stigma for the individual. Problem is not within the person it's within the history of colonization which was filled with generational violence.
- TIC must process the story in the context of history and colonization.
- Broader context = less stigma
- Storytelling, within an expanded Native Trauma Informed Care Model, facilitates reconnection/reintegration through reindigenization.

Kairos Blanket Exercise

James Fenelon, Ph.D. & Julia Bogany

- Dramatic structure can lead to understanding historical trauma and the impact of current colonization forces on American Indians.
- The KAIROS Blanket Exercise is an interactive learning experience that teaches the Indigenous rights history we're rarely taught. Developed in response to the 1996 Report of the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#)—which recommended education on Canadian-Indigenous history as one of the key steps to reconciliation, the Blanket Exercise covers over 500 years of history in a one and a half hour participatory workshop.

Kairos Blanket Activity

- Pre Contact: Creation Stories
- Early Contact: Loss of Life and Land
- Colonialism: Assimilation- Boarding School, Forced Adoption, Relocation
- Current Reindiginizaton: Bird Songs, Land Restoration, Historical Accuracy, Healing Centers

If this is your land where are your Stories?



Okri, a Nigerian storyteller

In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.